

2018

## Is leadership the key to public sector retention in regional Western Australia? An exploratory study

Damian Lambert  
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**Is leadership the key to  
public sector retention in  
regional Western Australia?  
An exploratory study**

This thesis is presented for the degree of  
**Master of Management by Research**

**Damian Lambert**

Edith Cowan University  
School of Business and Law

2018

## **ABSTRACT**

This research reviewed retention factors affecting the West Australian public sector (WAPS) in regional areas seeking to determine whether a leadership development program (LDP) could provide a strategic HRM solution. Using a mixed methods approach views of 9 leaders and 156 regional WAPS employees provided insights on retention issues and how a LDP might be designed and delivered to regional employees. Despite the attraction and retention factors impacting the WAPS, it was found that a LDP designed specifically for the regions can assist to attract talented staff and to a lesser extent improve retention in the regions.

## DECLARATION

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# **CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION**

## **1.1 Introduction**

The public sector provides essential services to the community such as education, health, emergency services, agriculture and biosecurity research. These services are provided in metropolitan areas by the Western Australian (WA) State Government as well to regional communities, the provision of which assist the economic prosperity of these regional communities (Shean, 2010a) . Like many organisations, the WA Public Sector (WAPS) is facing a range of workforce issues such as the increasing number of employees who are approaching retirement age, the lower number of younger employees entering the WAPS and the fluctuating growth in regional locations (Shean, 2010a; Wauchope, 2007).

As the population ages, the demand on these services provided by the WAPS, particularly in the health and age-related care, will progressively increase. Other areas such as education will also see growth due to increases in fertility rates (a ten year high in 30 June 2005) and increases in migration into WA (Wauchope, 2007).

These challenges present workforce pressures on the WAPS, particularly in regional locations where departure of public sector staff are not easily filled from local community labour markets. Providing these services often requires extensive time and training of employees before they can effectively fill these highly skilled roles, limiting the option that there will be a locally grown replacement available. As such, filling these vacancies often relies on external labour markets and attracting employees to some of these locations can be difficult (Shean, 2010b). Therefore, rather than accepting this situation, retention of these talented and skilled employees in the regional location is increasingly important in the public sector.

The researcher is an employee at the Public Sector Commission. At the commencement of this study, the researcher was involved in one of several working groups under the Royalties for Regions program (Rosair, 2010) to review workforce planning strategies and address regional retention issues. The concept of a leadership development program for regional WA, was seen to be a potential measure to address the retention issues being faced, whilst also providing a mechanism for sharing corporate knowledge and building the leadership capability required to meet future demands in the regions (Wauchope, 2009).

The purpose of this exploratory study is to identify the factors affecting retention in regional WAPS agencies and ascertain if leadership development could be an effective strategy to address this concern.

This chapter is divided into eight sections. The first section provides an overview of the workforce pressures facing the WAPS providing important background for this research. The second section provides information about the design and structure of the regional WAPS workforce to gain an understanding of the impact of these workforce pressures. Leadership development as a retention strategy is the focus of this exploratory study and is introduced in the third section, to show why it is a possible solution to the current retention issues facing the WAPS. The remaining sections identify the research problem, the design of the research and the expected outcomes from this exploratory study, with the chapter concluding by providing an overview of the thesis structure.

## **1.2 Background for this research**

A recurring theme in the WA economy has been the concept of a “two speed economy” that is created by booms in the resources sector (Wood, 2013). A “two speed economy” is created when high levels of business investment and strong employment growth create a labour shortage, which in turn drives

wages growth, due to increased competition for labour (Wood, 2013). The boom created in WA during the mid-2000's was stimulated by high commodity prices and stronger strategic links with Asia. During this time, the WA economy (as measured by gross State product) was experiencing continued growth (4.5%-7.5%), resulting in low unemployment levels (4.8%) and high (68%) participation rates (Marney, 2005).

The WAPS was not immune to the impact of this increase in labour demand with Table 1.1 showing high turnover rates for the public sector across age groups for the period 2008/09 to 2011/12 (Wauchope, 2012). Anecdotal evidence indicated that these higher turnover rates were due to WAPS employees being drawn to the higher salaries offered in the resources sector particularly where the employee was already residing in the regional area. These high turnover rates had a direct impact on the availability and at times quality of service delivery in regional WA, thus highlighting the need to address retention in these regional locations.

**Table 1.1 Turnover rates in the WA Public Sector – 2008/09 to 2011/12**

Category	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
WA public sector	15.7%	17.5%	14.4%	17.8%
Under 25 years	19.5%	21.3%	18.6%	21.2%
25–44 years	15.0%	16.6%	13.8%	16.3%
45 years and over	11.3%	12.2%	10.6%	13.1%

(Derived from Wauchope, 2012).

The need to undertake workforce planning was further highlighted when considering the retirement intentions survey of 2006, which indicated that thirty-two percent of employees intended to retire from the WAPS in less than five years and sixty-four percent of respondents intended to retire in the next ten years (Wauchope, 2007). The strong economy led to more favourable conditions for employees to retire earlier causing a greater impact on the regional workforce. These factors pointed towards a pending problem for the WAPS if left unresolved.

In addition to these high turnover rates, other statistics in the 2012 State of the Sector Report, showed an aging workforce with almost a quarter (23.1%) being over 55 years of age and almost sixty-five percent being over the age of 35. This combined with small numbers of younger employees, less than five percent under the age of 24, and the high exit rates for these age categories (21% as indicated in Table 1.1) was seen to place additional strain on the workforce. These movements from within the WAPS also impact on corporate knowledge within the region and can create a leadership capability gap (Wauchope, 2009). These workforce statistics elevated the importance to take a longer-term view on workforce planning requirements within WAPS. Unfortunately, these workforce statistics are not the only issue facing the WAPS, as the competition for labour also increases the impact of these workforce issues.

#### **1.2.1 The competition for talent in a tight labour market**

Many of the occupations found within the public sector have transferable skills that are highly sought after in the private sector, particularly in a tight labour market. Table 1.2 highlights the Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations (ANZSCO) major groupings for the WAPS and provides comparison against the wider WA workforce (Wauchope, 2012). The major occupation groups that are in competition are managers, professionals and clerical and administrative workers.

Whilst the technicians and trades workers are a smaller segment of the WAPS, they still bare a significant risk for the WAPS as some agencies such as Main Roads and Department of Transport have high representation of these class of occupations (Wauchope, 2012) and with industry and the WAPS training less apprentices and trainees, these skilled workers at times of low unemployment are highly sought after. The specific types of occupations that are in high demand can be found in the State Priority Occupation List (SPOL),

developed by the Department of Training and Workforce Development (Shean, 2010c).

**Table 1.2 Comparison of ANZSCO occupation ratings 2012**

<b>ANZSCO Major Groups</b>	<b>WAPS %</b>	<b>WA Workforce %</b>
Managers	6.3	12.2
Professionals	45.4	20.2
Technicians and Trades Workers	4.1	17.3
Community and Personal Service Workers	20.9	9.3
Clerical and Administrative Workers	17.4	13.5
Sales Workers	0.4	8.4
Machinery Operators and Drivers	0.6	9.0
Labourers	5.0	10.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Note: The ANZSCO is a skill-based classification of occupations developed as a national standard for organising occupation related information. (Derived from Wauchope, 2012).

The SPOL identifies the in-demand occupations for the state on an annual basis. The list is divided into three categories, Top priority, High priority and Priority occupations. Top priority occupations are characterised by a combination of one or more of the following factors:

- very large levels of employment;
- high forecast growth and evident wage pressures;
- high levels of skill;
- longer education or training lead times;
- clear education and training pathways and;
- clear and evident skills shortage (Shean, 2010c).

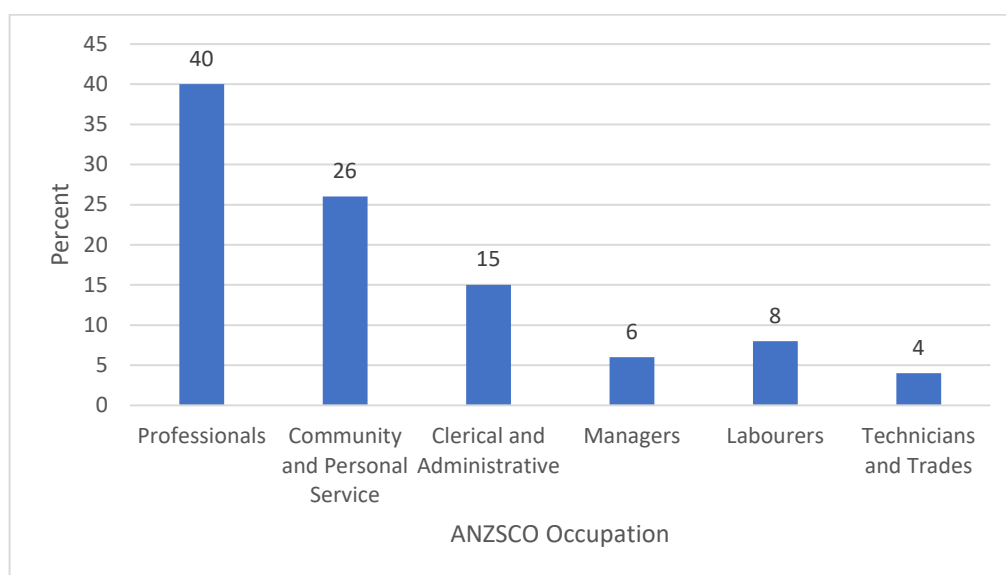
In reviewing the list of critical occupations for 2012, the major groups in competition with the WAPS include:

- higher skilled managers (engineering, ICT, business development);
- professionals (accountant, auditor, finance, HR, engineers, health);



- community and personal service workers (enrolled nurse, aged care);
- clerical and administrative workers (office manager, HR, supply clerk);
- technical and trades (civil, ICT, fitter/turner, welders, machinist, construction) (Shean, 2010c).

These roles are also representative of those found across all levels of the WAPS in the regions (Wauchope, 2012). Figure 1.1 shows the percentage of the various occupation groups located across regional WA, the graph represents the values between 0-40% as indicated.



(Derived from Wauchope, 2012).

**Figure 1.1 Regional ANZSCO occupation groups**

The higher turnover rates, seen in the above section indicate that many WAPS employees were attracted to the private sector for these similar job opportunities. The regional WAPS workforce is also susceptible to these tight labour market trends.

### **1.2.2 Competing on the attraction stage**

The previous parts highlighted the workforce planning issues facing the WAPS, as an increasing aging workforce, lower numbers of younger employees entering the WAPS and competition for labour driven by high wages growth resulting in higher than usual turnover rates in the WAPS. To address these workforce issues there are two main strategies available to employers.

Firstly, retain current employees, as Chapter 2 will highlight (2.1 to 2.3), retaining employees is a preferable option in most situations. The second strategy is to attract employees to the organisation, with one approach being to provide financial incentives in the forms of compensation and benefits such as company discounts, stock options and higher salaries (Gordon & Lowe, 2002; Rhule, 2004; Soldan & Nankervis, 2014). This first attraction strategy is not a viable alternative for the WAPS which has limited finances and is unable to offer individual financial incentives due to the collective industrial awards and agreements that are in place.

The alternative approach for attracting employees is to provide “soft” benefits to employees, such as day care, fitness centre membership, flexible work options, casual dress and personal development (Gordon & Lowe, 2002; Rhule, 2004; Soldan & Nankervis, 2014). Again, whilst some of these later strategies are more achievable within the WAPS, such as personal development, casual dress and flexible work options, the remainder still have some form of financial impost which may be unworkable in the WAPS. These “soft” benefits may also be uncompetitive in comparison to higher financial benefits offered elsewhere in the labour marketplace.

In addition to these financial restrictions on attraction, the public sector has often been viewed as a “less desirable” employment option than private sector employment for a few reasons. A perception still exists that public sector jobs are boring or sub-standard compared to the more dynamic commercial world

(Bentley & Allen, 2006). The public sector also is seen as offering lower pay rates than its private sector counterparts and pay rises that may barely match the rate of inflation (Bentley, 2008).

This undesirable image is extended by the existing high levels of bureaucracy and the need to “rise through the ranks”, i.e. the step by step approach of gaining promotion through each layer and spending your time at these levels before being able to progress to the next layer, perceptions that particularly deter younger employees (Bentley, 2008; Bentley & Allen, 2006) who might be able in a merit based system be able to jump several levels at a time or commence in a high level position rather than at an entry level. Difficult appraisal and promotion systems, a lack of physical resources such as mobile phones or handheld devices (which may come as standard items in private roles), high levels of managerial responsibility for the pay and increasing workloads are other issues (Bentley, 2008; Bentley & Allen, 2006; Hunter & Jones, 2006).

As attraction as a strategy for the WAPS has even more limited application in times of high labour demand, employee retention is becoming the primary HRM strategy employed. This section has identified that the WAPS is facing a range of workforce issues being an increasing aging workforce, lower numbers of younger employees entering the WAPS and competition for labour. These workforce issues are exacerbated due to additional factors which are unique to the regions but begin to point to the need for a strategic HRM response that focuses on retention.

### **1.3 The public sector regional workforce**

Western Australia is a vast state with a population density of approximately one person per square kilometre, where geographical distance and low economies of scale pose additional challenges (Shean, 2010b). The WAPS is representative of the population as it is spread across the state, however for

administrative purposes the state has been divided by the WAPS into nine operational regions based on their economic and geographic location within the state. The *Regional Development Commissions Act 1993* is the authority which creates the nine regions being: Kimberley, Pilbara, Gascoyne, Mid-West, Wheatbelt, Peel, Kalgoorlie-Esperance, South West and Great Southern.

Most WAPS services are available in regional centres which in turn service neighbouring small towns. For example, Albany would be the regional centre servicing smaller towns such as Denmark and Mount Barker. Public services are also offered in remote locations. These remote locations are generally found in the north (e.g. Halls Creek), central (e.g. Meekatharra) and east of the state (e.g. Laverton).

The structure of a regional office would comprise approximately seven to fifteen employees, headed by a Regional Director. A Regional Director is a member of the Senior Executive Service (SES). Public sector leaders are categorized into two classification levels: the first comprises the SES, which are those leaders responsible for high level decision making, policy advice and oversight. The second classification is the aspiring leader group which comprises those employees holding management and supervisory positions at levels 6 to 8 under the Public Service and Government Officers General Agreement (PSGOGA) 2014 (Wauchope, 2016b).

In WA, this style of regional leadership policy began with the appointment of a State Minister for the North West in 1919, but was largely overseen by centralised public service decision-making based in Perth (Clifford, 2010). until the late 1970s and 1980s when a network of regional offices was established to co-ordinate and promote regional economic development. These offices created direct relationships with the wider local community, providing more formalised and coordinated leadership in regional WA (Clifford, 2010).

The creation of this structure of government is largely in response to regional towns, historically being subject to labour cycles (Carson, Coe, Zander, & Garnett, 2010). For example, in the agricultural sector labour is regularly imported to deal with peak demands, for example shearing sheep or harvesting and those recruits leave once these seasonal roles are completed. The situation is similar in the resources sector where mining townsites are largely supported by transient labour (Carson et al., 2010).

This fluctuating growth of labour markets in regional locations is a significant factor impacting the WAPS workforce, as the allocation of public services and therefore the provision of health, justice, education and infrastructure services become dependent upon the size of the community (Shean, 2010b). More recently, some regions have experienced exponential growth, whereas, other communities are experiencing declines in population (Shean, 2010b). To put this into context, Table 1.3 shows that the regions have seen significant changes in public sector employment between 2012 and 2016 (Wauchope, 2016b).

As can be seen, almost all WA regional areas have seen significant changes in the availability of full time WAPS positions, reflective of the changing populations in regional locations. In comparison, the metropolitan area has remained relatively stable (Wauchope, 2016b).

In a few instances changes in government policy have resulted in the alterations to positions in these locations, however, overall, the number of available positions across the regions have remained consistent with a net increase of almost three percent (2.8%) over the last four years since 2012 (Wauchope, 2016b).

**Table 1.3 WA Public Sector employment changes since 2012**

Region	Full time positions 2016	% Change since 2012
Perth metropolitan	82, 046	-0.4
Gascoyne	543	-9.0
Goldfields – Esperance	2, 448	-1.7
Great Southern	2, 571	-12.1
Kimberley	3, 003	6.3
Midwest	2, 680	-1.6
Peel	2, 428	14.5
Pilbara	2, 291	-2.0
South West	6, 643	14.6
Wheatbelt	3, 096	-6.2

(Derived from Wauchope, 2016b).

The two largest changes in regional WAPS employment are shown in Table 1.3, with significant increases to Peel and the South West regions. In respect to the Peel region, the increase specifically stems from the relocation of the Department of Fire and Emergency Services from the metropolitan region. This is due to the ease of access that Peel is afforded to the metropolitan area through the freeway and train line extensions, with many considering this region to now be a wider part of the Perth metropolitan area.

The largest increase can be seen in the South West region. This increase was largely due to the amalgamation of several regional head offices from the Wheatbelt and Great Southern Regions. Like the Peel region, the South West region has also seen considerable population growth in Busselton (3.2%) and Australind (2.6%) during the 2015-2016 fiscal year (ABS 2016).

Historically, the WAPS had been able to adjust to these changing populations and demands through the methods in which regional vacancies were filled. Previously, regional vacancies were filled by existing WAPS employees from the metropolitan area, under a system whereby the employee was transferred to the region for a set posting period, on a form of contract. At the completion

of the posting period, permanency to the public sector was offered and the person gained a position back in the metropolitan area. This system enabled a more structured approach to gaining a permanent position as traditionally, permanency for many departments was more difficult to secure in the metropolitan area. As such, employees would seek out regional opportunities, complete their service time in the region and then seek transfer back to Perth, having now gained a permanent appointment. This approach was also utilised for promotional opportunities. Working in the regions also provided employees with additional financial benefits, such as reduced housing costs (very low rent), location allowances and travel allowances. These additional conditions made regional employment more attractive than is necessarily the case for WAPS employees today.

In more recent years, changes to public sector standards and the recruitment practices of public sector agencies have resulted in an increased ability for employees to gain permanency in Perth (Wauchope, 2009). Despite a variety of allowances and other financial benefits still being available, the number of WAPS employees applying for regional positions has declined. This previous system of posting out to the region is now less effective and only operates formally within some, rather than all, departments and occupations. Most regional positions are now publicly advertised to the wider labour market, being in direct competition with the more attractive private sector.

This section has demonstrated that the regional retention problem is not a unique or recent issue. It is created by a pattern of labour churn which is institutionalised in the economic design of regional towns and communities (Carson et al., 2010). The previous system of attracting WAPS employees to the regions is not as effective as it once was, which has resulted in a lower number of WAPS applicants seeking regional roles (Hogan, Moxham, & Dwyer, 2007). This combined with an ageing workforce, lower number of young employees entering the WAPS and competition in the labour market means that a more strategic approach to human resource management (HRM)

practices, focussing on retaining existing employees in regional locations is clearly a priority. Leadership development was seen as the preferred approach by the Royalties for Regions working group, to ensure WAPS employees remain committed and valued employees in the regions (Hogan et al., 2007).

#### **1.4 Strategic HRM and leadership development as retention strategies**

The previous sections have highlighted that retention is the preferred strategy to assist with the workforce issues experienced in the regional WAPS. Strategic human resource management (SHRM) practices that can help attract and retain staff, for example through increasing job or career satisfaction, are therefore of increasing interest to the WAPS. One of these strategic practices and a goal for the WAPS is increasing leadership development for senior staff (SES) and mid-level (aspirant leaders), as this strategy is seen to also meet employee's increased expectations of the capability of their leaders and of themselves as they look to be able to take on leadership roles in the public sector.

Before discussing the importance of SHRM to the WAPS, it is important to clarify what leadership entails and its application to the WAPS. Leadership is not to be confused with management, yet these terms are often interchanged, especially in the public sector. Management is related to the business operations and incorporates competencies such as finance, human resources, occupational safety, administration and the various organisational policies and procedures that support day to day operations. Leadership on the other hand is related to soft skills such as demonstrating strong personal values, emotional intelligence, resilience, strategic thinking, communication and relationship management, skills that are not able to be taught in traditional classroom approaches (Bradley, Grice, & Paulsen, 2017).



Development of leadership capability over these management skills, will assist those currently holding management positions and those aspiring toward improving their leadership capability to gain a greater appreciation of the complexities of regional locations, to focus on their employee's wellbeing and future development and better serve the wider community.

Like any form of development, leadership requires the acquisition of skills and an ability to practise those skills to become more expert at applying them. The concept of a skill is separate to the knowledge needed to be able to perform the skill. In learning terms, a skill is the combination of several abilities working in conjunction with the underpinning knowledge to perform a particular task or series of tasks (Tovey & Lawlor, 2004). This differs to a competency, which is the state of being competent to perform the activity to a particular standard (Tovey & Lawlor, 2004). These terms maybe used in broadly similar ways throughout this research as a WAPS employee may have the required underpinning knowledge and the culmination of the required abilities to achieve the 'skill' but may lack the competency to apply these aspects to the required standard. Participants in a leadership development program (LDP) may require development in either the underpinning knowledge, the abilities, or the skill in the first instance or may already possess these and only require development to gain increased competency of the leadership skill. Leadership development is therefore becoming a key focus in SHRM as leadership is seen as a core competency for modern organisations (Angel, Manuela, María José, & de-Luis-Carnicer, 2008).

It is considered that public sector organisations can use leadership development as a strategy to improve job satisfaction and employee retention, linking staff capability to organisational strategy (Compton, Morrissey, & Nankervis, 2002; Hogan et al., 2007). Previously, the government's political focus on retention in regional areas has been on infrastructure development, thus improving the lifestyle factors in the regions, but this by itself is insufficient unless staff with the required corporate knowledge and leadership capability

to capitalise on this investment are encouraged to stay in these areas (Aijala, 2001).

It is expected that leadership development can encourage aspirant leaders and the SES to stay in regional offices, and through them improve the quality of the work environment which may encourage other staff to stay. This is particularly relevant in the smaller offices found in the regions, where employees are interacting both in the workplace and potentially in social contexts. As such, it is expected that poor working relationships are going to have greater impacts on employee wellbeing and office efficiency. Research has recognised that leadership style strongly influences both employee wellbeing and other organisational outcomes such as job satisfaction, organisational commitment and turnover intention (Northouse, 2016; Samad, Reaburn, Davis, & Ahmed, 2015).

The smaller offices in the regions also tend toward a wider scope of job roles in regional positions compared to their metropolitan counterparts. This is largely due to the WAPS governance requirements that are in place which do not alter, regardless on the size of the organisation. In this context, the same number of requirements are in place for an office that has ten people, as is for an office that has five hundred people. Regional employees are therefore required to have knowledge of a broader set of legislation, instructions and standards. These factors may impact employee wellbeing and job satisfaction in regional locations.

Research on LDP's has focused on course curriculum and content, delivery methods, cost-effectiveness and graduate performance, including participants' perceptions of their leadership improvement (Allen, Cairnes, & Farley, 1997; Davies, 2007; McKenzie, 2001; Nabben, 2011; Pero & Smith, 2008). LDP's can assume many different delivery options, with individual coaching in the workplace becoming a popular form of development for more senior leaders, whilst other options include retreats or academies for professional

development (Davis, 2014; Day & Antonakis, 2012; Dubrin, Dalglish, & Miller, 2006).

The vast geographic expanse of WA places barriers to any LDP that might be implemented across the WAPS, given the isolation of some locations, and thus preferable options could involve delivery of the content in the region, further supported by coaching and mentoring options.

In reviewing the types of LDP's available, there are several providers that are available in the market place that are accessible in WA. The LDP's offered are largely generic, with some providers being able to customise the material to suit audience needs but few specifically mention a dedicated regional leadership component. The design of these courses is largely face to face, and of varying length, but promote lasting professional networks. Some of the variations in the delivery methods include monthly modules, an eight day residential program, facilitated discussions, presentations and overseas study tours. A LDP which is currently available on the market and offered by a third party may provide a suitable option for the WAPS.

## **1.5 Research problem**

The previous sections of this chapter have highlighted that the WAPS faces a significant challenge in attracting and retaining employees in regional areas given the geographical isolation, changing growth of the regions and the WAPS cultural factors such as short-term contracts and established posting periods that are found in the regions. From recent experience, it has been shown that the problem is further compounded when a resources boom inflates private sector salaries in regional and remote areas. The WAPS must therefore take a more strategic approach to human resource management, with the preferred option being to retain employees in the regions.

This study was initiated to examine the potential for leadership development to improve retention in regional employees. It was subsequently expanded to consider the benefit of a LDP to attraction as well as retention based on collected data showing that some regional managers found attraction the greater problem.

This study examines both regional manager's and employee's perceptions of the value of leadership development initiatives, and how such opportunities might affect WAPS employee's willingness to stay in regional locations. A key element of this study was to examine differences between leadership in metropolitan and regional offices, and particularly to determine whether leadership might be more important or have different characteristics in the regional context. The study will explore the following research questions:

1. How does leadership in regional WA public sector offices differ from that required in metropolitan WA public sector offices?
2. What skills do leaders need in order to address the challenges of regional work and living?
3. What is the preferred way to develop the leadership skills of staff in regional locations?
4. Would the offer of leadership (management) development through a regional specific program assist in retaining regional staff?

## **1.6 Research design**

This study is exploratory in nature as there has been little previous research on the problem of attracting and retaining employees through LDPs in regional Australia. Some previous research on aspects of leadership unique to regional settings provides useful background (see Chapter 2), but how this relates to public sector leadership, and the effects of leadership development on attraction and retention in any context have received little previous study.

The research questions above are answered with both qualitative and quantitative methods. Interviews with public sector managers holding SES or aspirant leader positions in regional WA were used to gain an initial perspective on the four research questions. These interviews were conducted in eight regional centres: Kimberly, Pilbara, Gascoyne, Geraldton, Bunbury, Albany, Northam and Kalgoorlie. A quantitative survey was then used to gather regional employee's views which included the SES and aspirant leader's views, relevant to Research Questions two to four, focusing on what problems might cause them to leave the regional workforce, what leadership skills they would like to develop and what is the preferred method to achieve this. The interview data was analysed with thematic analysis, and the survey data was summarised with descriptive statistics.

The online survey gathered the views of employees across a range of WAPS agencies' regional locations including regional centres, smaller country towns and remote locations. The survey was distributed to department human resource managers with a request to forward it to all their regional employees. It was highly desirable that the agencies have a representation in the sample proportional to their presence in the regions. As an exploratory study, it should lead to more specific research questions for future research. It is anticipated that the study will also guide the development of a LDP specific for regional WA which can later be evaluated for the impact on attraction and retention, if the LDP is implemented.

## **1.7 Expected outcomes**

This research provides significant outcomes for both researchers and managers interested in strategic HRM issues particular to regional contexts, an aspect of management in Australia that is poorly researched or considered in public discussions. First, it will contribute to the limited body of research relating leadership development and retention generally, and provides public sector and regional perspectives on this problem. In Australia, retention of

regional workforces is a significant social and economic problem for not only State and Commonwealth government agencies but also private sector and not-for-profit organisations (Carson et al., 2010; Miles, Marshall, Rolfe, & Noonan, 2006; Soldan & Nankervis, 2014).

It is anticipated that leadership development can not only assist regional areas by providing a career pathway and enticing employees to remain the region, but can also improve the operational performance and work climate in regional organisations, which typically lack access to the LDPs found in metropolitan areas. This study will also contribute to the growing body of literature on leadership and leadership development in regional areas, a topic important to community and social development as well as organisational performance.

The study also contributes to managerial understanding by helping the WAPS evaluate if leadership development is a viable strategy for improving retention in regional areas. The interview findings will improve depth of understanding of the unique issues faced by aspirant leaders and SES in regional areas, the shortcomings in current staff development practices and policies, possible barriers to developing innovative programs, and the design of such programs. The survey of employees will improve understanding of what causes turnover, what leadership skills staff would like to develop to help them in the performance of their role in WAPS and what program format would work best from their viewpoint.

## **1.8 Structure of the thesis**

After this introduction, Chapter 2 is divided into three main sections. The first reviews the academic literature on retention, looking at turnover and the relationship to SHRM in a WAPS workforce context and how management is distinguished from leadership. The second section considers leadership, looking at the major theories developed over the past century, how leadership is defined, the characteristics considered unique to Australian leadership

generally, and whether leadership in regional areas has been identified in the literature as having different qualities. The final section reviews current LDPs available in WA, in particular it identifies considerations in developing a LDP and reviews previous research on regional LDPs. Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature to ascertain past findings that may support and direct this current body of research.

Chapter 3 describes the conceptual framework, research design and the qualitative and quantitative methodologies used in this research. A description of the sampling and participants are provided along with the data collection methods and process for analysis of the data. This chapter also discusses the pilot study which provided improvements to the online survey increasing the trustworthiness and reliability of the collected data.

Chapter 4 presents the findings from the interviews with public sector managers holding SES or aspirant leader positions in regional WA. The chapter addresses the four main research questions and commences with an overview of the participants' demographic details before discussing the five main themes identified through thematic analysis.

Chapter 5 presents the findings from the online survey, with the respondents being regional employees from across all levels of the WAPS. The chapter addresses research questions two to four. Information is provided on the leadership skills required in regional locations as viewed through interviews with SES and aspirant leaders currently holding positions in regional WA and via a survey distributed to all levels of employees across the WAPS in regional locations. Respondents views on which of these leadership skills are the most important skills needing development are also discussed, followed by how a LDP might be designed and delivered for regional employees. The final section reviews factors affecting retention in the regions and highlights that both work and non-work factors are responsible for impacting retention in the regions.

Chapter 6 combines the results of Chapter 4 and 5 to compare and integrate the main two sets of data by discussing the findings to the four main research questions concerning: (i) identifying the differences between leadership in regional and metropolitan areas, (ii) the skills required of a regional leader, (iii) the potential content of a regional LDP, and (iv) if leadership development would improve retention in the regions, relating each section to the literature.

Chapter 7 concludes the thesis by providing a summary of the key findings. The implications for future research and the contribution of the findings to the literature are described. The chapter concludes by identifying the limitations to the study.

## **1.9 Conclusion**

This chapter identified that the WAPS is facing a range of workforce issues such as the increasing number of employees who are approaching retirement age, the lower number of younger employees entering the WAPS and the fluctuating growth in regional locations (Shean, 2010b; Wauchope, 2007). These identified workforce issues combined with an economic environment where competition in the labour market was strong, resulted in higher rates of turnover in the WAPS, where anecdotally regional WAPS employees were taking advantage of the financial benefits offered in the private sector (Shean, 2010b; Wauchope, 2012).

The WAPS is unable to compete against the private sector due to limited finances and the inability to offer individual financial incentives due to the collective industrial awards and agreements that are in place. In addition, employment in the public sector has traditionally attracted a limited field of applicant's due to the perceptions that make the public sector a less desirable place to work such as WAPS roles being boring or sub-standard, the lower pay, high levels of bureaucracy and barriers to career progression where there is a requirement to progress through the various levels of the WAPS (Bentley,



2008; Bentley & Allen, 2006; Hunter & Jones, 2006). Focussing on retaining WAPS employees who are currently working in the regions is the primary strategy to address these workforce pressures for regional locations.

At the commencement of this study, the researcher was involved in a working group under the Royalties for Regions program whereby leadership development was identified as one of the potential measures to address the retention issues being faced in the regions. As an exploratory study into the suitability of leadership development as a retention strategy for the regional WAPS, it is anticipated that this study will provide valuable information to support this approach.

## **CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter outlines the theoretical and empirical findings from the literature on the issues forming the context of this study. This review seeks to understand these concepts in the context of regional Western Australian public sector (WAPS) offices. This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section seeks to explore employee turnover, connecting the literature to employee retention in the regional setting and the requirement to engage strategic human resource management (SHRM) practices as retention strategies. An overview of the WAPS, highlights the importance of retention strategies for the sector in this section. This section reviews leadership development as a SHRM practice and highlights the differences between management and leadership.

The second section provides a historical overview of theories of leadership, the culture of leadership in Australian organisations and the nature of leadership in regional workplaces. The chapter concludes by identifying the leadership development programs (LDPs) available in WA, explores the research on regional LDPs, the considerations in developing a LDP, and the skills that previous LDPs have attempted to improve.

## **EMPLOYEE TURNOVER, RETENTION AND STRATEGIC HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT**

### **2.2 Employee turnover**

The considerable research into employee turnover mostly concentrates on American business and government contexts of the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century,

and especially on factors creating organisational dissatisfaction underlying voluntary turnover or attrition. Many studies have measured the relationship between turnover and predictor variables (Belbin, Erwee, & Wiesner, 2012; Roche, Duffield, Dimitrelis, & Frew, 2015; Samad et al., 2015).

Employee turnover has been defined as: “the cessation of membership in an organisation by an individual who received monetary compensation from the organisation” (Mobley, 1982). Researchers further clarify this by differentiating involuntary and voluntary turnover, and unavoidable versus avoidable turnover (Lynch & Tuckey, 2004).

### **2.2.1 Involuntary versus voluntary turnover**

Involuntary turnover is where employees are forced from an organisation by management as result of internal or external factors (Drew, 2003; Lynch & Tuckey, 2004) including age-related retirement, medical retirement, dismissal or death (Lynch & Tuckey, 2004). Conversely, voluntary turnover involves an employee-initiated choice to leave the organisation through resignation (Drew, 2003; Lynch & Tuckey, 2004). The difference between these two types of turnover is the employee’s degree of control over the decision (Drew, 2003; Lynch & Tuckey, 2004). However the boundaries can be somewhat ambiguous, for example employees may be pressured to resign for fear of being unable to obtain future employment if formally dismissed (Lynch & Tuckey, 2004). Further complicating the research area, some studies do not separate voluntary and involuntary turnover but concentrate instead on unavoidable vs. avoidable turnover (Drew, 2003).

### **2.2.2 Unavoidable and avoidable turnover**

Where the voluntary-involuntary dimension describes an employee’s degree of control over separation from the organisation, the unavoidable-avoidable dimension highlights the degree of control the *organisation* has over an employee’s departure (Lynch & Tuckey, 2004). In forms of involuntary turnover such as age retirement, medical retirement or death the separation is

unavoidable to the organisation (Lynch & Tuckey, 2004). Li, Lee, Mitchell, Hom, and Griffeth (2016) also considered voluntary resignation an avoidable form of turnover as it is not necessarily inevitable that employees will resign, as they may be a reluctant stayer (those who want to leave but feel they have to stay) until such time as the circumstances change (e.g. improved external employment prospects) and they are able to leave. This is unlike formal dismissal where the organisation has control. To reduce avoidable turnover the organisation can improve working conditions or incentives (Lynch & Tuckey, 2004).

### **2.2.3 Causes of voluntary turnover**

Research on the causes of turnover addresses four interrelated themes: “organisational variables, external environment variables, individual work related variables and individual non-work related variables” (Mobley, 1982). Further explanation of each of these constructs is given below.

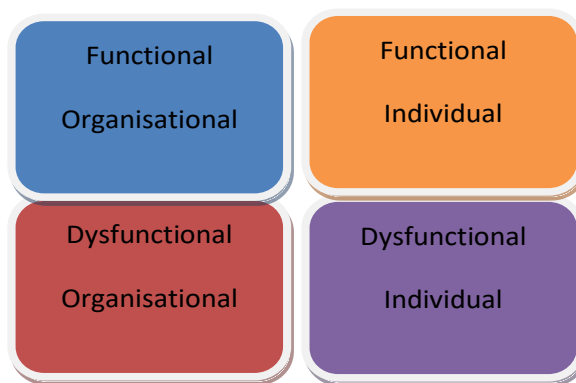
- **Organisational variables** – encompass structural, categorical and descriptive characteristics including: leader-member exchange, managerial motivation, employee satisfaction, role conflict, promotions and organisational culture (Lynch & Tuckey, 2004).
- **External environmental variables** – include the economy, unemployment levels, union presence and the availability of other jobs (Lynch & Tuckey, 2004).
- **Individual work-related variables** – include the behavioural intentions of an employee to quit or stay, and measure intentions rather than actual turnover behaviour. Employee satisfaction and organisational commitment are the most frequently studied constructs in this area and have strong positive correlations with each other and with employee turnover (Mobley, 1982).
- **Individual non-work variables** – include personal characteristics and demographic predictors such as age, personality and kinship

responsibilities, all of which have some relationship to turnover (Belbin et al., 2012; Lynch & Tuckey, 2004).

Thus, research suggests voluntary turnover can be predicted from job attitudes, demographic variables and organisational characteristics.

#### 2.2.4 Consequences of employee turnover

It is widely acknowledged that turnover affects the bottom line and thus the organisation's ability to maintain a competitive advantage (Belbin et al., 2012; Bradley et al., 2017; Goldsmith, Walt, & Doucet, 1999; Gordon & Lowe, 2002; Samad et al., 2015). While research in this area has traditionally focused on the negative consequences for the organisation, employee turnover can also result in positive outcomes for the organisation, the outgoing individual and the remaining employees (Drew, 2003). Thus, there are both functional and dysfunctional aspects to turnover (Lynch & Tuckey, 2004), as shown in Figure 2.1.



(Derived from Mobley, 1982).

**Figure 2.1 Consequences of Employee Turnover**

The *functionally positive aspects for the organisation* include prevention of stagnation, reduction of employee withdrawal behaviours (e.g., sick leave or poor performance), displacement of poor performers, facilitation of cultural

change, increased technological uptake, reduced labour costs, introduction of new knowledge and restructuring of the organisation (Drew, 2003; Lynch & Tuckey, 2004).

The *dysfunctional aspects for the organisation* are extremely well researched and include both direct and indirect costs associated with turnover. *Direct costs* include the economic cost of separation, replacement, training, productivity losses, overtime, impaired service delivery or quality, and lost business opportunities (Drew, 2003; Lynch & Tuckey, 2004). Cascio (2000), suggests the direct cost of turnover may be 1.5 to 2.5 times the annual salary of the exiting employee. *Indirect costs* identified in the literature include loss of organisational or job-specific knowledge, employee demoralisation, impaired service delivery and strategic human resource management issues in the loss of highly skilled or hard-to-replace employees (Beck & Wilson, 1995; Drew, 2003; Lynch & Tuckey, 2004; Radford & Chapman, 2015).

It is well documented that *positive outcomes for the departing individual* include a more congruent person-organisation fit, career advancement, increased salary or benefits, greater work-life balance and greater development opportunities (Boni, 2005; Demers, 2002; Goldsmith et al., 1999; Jayne, 2003; Sanow, 2006; Wahl & Bogomolny, 2004). *Employees remaining* may experience similar outcomes due to movement within the organisation and new opportunities created by the departures (Drew, 2003).

*Individuals remaining* with the organisation may also experience *negative outcomes* in demoralisation and increased work pressure, which can result in further turnover (Drew, 2003; Lynch & Tuckey, 2004). *Individuals exiting* the organisation may experience a loss in seniority, reduced fringe benefits, increased stress, relocation costs, termination of social networks, loss of community services, disruption to partners and family, and dissatisfaction with job expectations (Drew, 2003; Lynch & Tuckey, 2004).

### **2.2.5 Turnover intention and organisational commitment**

Turnover intention is another term that is used in this field. Turnover intention is like involuntary turnover, in that, it is a deliberate and conscious motivation to leave the organisation i.e. the time preceding the actual departure (Samad et al., 2015). There is robust evidence that supports the notion that staying and leaving involve different psychological and emotional processes and thus a person may stay with an organisation but have every intention to leave once the circumstances are right (Li et al., 2016; Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, & Graske, 2001). The right circumstances to stimulate this psychological change of a turnover “intention” can result from an alignment of several factors as identified by Mobley (1982) four interrelated themes as previously discussed (refer section 2.1.3) above (Belbin et al., 2012).

The research findings suggest that motivation at work is widely believed to be a key predictor of intention to quit the workplace (Belbin et al., 2012), with people staying if they are satisfied with their job and committed to the organisation and leaving when they are not (Mitchell et al., 2001). For example, many organisations place a premium on employee satisfaction in an attempt to improve organisational commitment and thus retain them (Gordon & Lowe, 2002).

Organisational commitment is defined as the employee’s *“emotional attachment to, identification with and involvement in a particular organisation”* (McShane & Travaglione, 2003, p. 130). It consists of affective commitment that is the loyalty to the organisation, colleagues and profession and continuance commitment which is the personal belief it is in the individuals interest to remain with the organisation (Gyensare, Anku-Tsede, Sanda, & Okpoti, 2016; McShane & Travaglione, 2003). Employee commitment to the organisation is therefore a significant consideration for an organisation to develop as emotional attachment to and involvement with the organisation has a positive impact on employee dedication (Gatling, Kang, & Kim, 2016).

### **2.2.6 Summary of employee turnover**

The literature has identified that turnover can have both positive and negative effects for the employees that remain in the organisation and the employees that leave. The turnover of employees also impacts on the organisation with the positive effects being prevention of stagnation, increased uptake of technology and the potential for innovative ideas and knowledge to enter the organisation (Drew, 2003; Lynch & Tuckey, 2004). In most cases however, organisations are keen to prevent high levels of employee turnover due to the dysfunctional organisational aspects that result (Drew, 2003; Lynch & Tuckey, 2004). The literature also identified that voluntary employee turnover is avoidable and can be addressed by the organisation, if strategies are implemented that alter an employee's turnover intention (Lynch & Tuckey, 2004). Organisational commitment and employee loyalty therefore, becomes a key factor for an organisation to foster within the workforce (Gatling et al., 2016).

### **2.3 Employee retention in the regional setting**

Employee retention is defined as “a company's ability to maximize the value of intellectual property by keeping employees engaged for the long term” (Rhule, 2004, p. 12). Strategies used to retain employees include compensation and benefits such as stock options, day care, fitness centre membership, flexible work hours, casual dress, personal development, company discounts or free food (Gordon & Lowe, 2002; Rhule, 2004; Soldan & Nankervis, 2014).

It must be noted however that turnover intention and retention are two separate processes and are not simply the opposite of each other (Belbin et al., 2012). Examining the factors that influence intention to stay rather than just factors that influence intention to leave is important as higher intentions to stay significantly increase employee retention (Radford & Chapman, 2015).



The prominent trends affecting employee retention include globalization, the increasing average age of employees, demographic or cultural changes, downsizing, and an increase in flexible or part-time work (Demers, 2002; Earle, 2003; Goldsmith et al., 1999; Roche et al., 2015; Samad et al., 2015). The continual changes in economic markets and the various internal and external environmental forces which organisations are subjected to, make it far more difficult to predict and achieve optimal staffing and service levels (Shean, 2010b). It is therefore important organisations plan to retain valued workers, a challenge that requires innovative human resource management (HRM) practices with a long-term strategic focus (Gordon & Lowe, 2002; Hogan et al., 2007; Kramar & Steane, 2012).

In today's fast-paced global environment retention has become a "war for talent" centred on developing the best strategies to reduce avoidable turnover and maintain the right balance of skills and experience within the organisation (Gordon & Lowe, 2002; Rhule, 2004). For example, in WA in 2009, a "war for talent" followed the labour shortages created by the resources boom in the minerals and energy sectors in regional areas (Shean, 2010a). This was due to the State's advanced major projects worth an estimated \$93 billion, representing eighty-two percent of all advanced projects in Australia (Shean, 2010a). These strong economic positions place pressure on certain sectors of the labour market, with some occupations experiencing skill shortages and increased demand that is unable to be filled. This highlights the characteristics of regional locations which are heavily reliant on imported labour due to changes in the resource cycles (Carson et al., 2010).

The "State Priority Occupation List" for 2010, highlights the critical industry occupations which were facing shortages. These occupations categories included managers, professionals, trades, community service workers, clerical and administrative workers and machinery drivers (Shean, 2010c). Aside from the trades and machinery drivers, the WAPS workforce is predominately comprised of the other occupation categories mentioned, that is four out of the

six categories identified (Wauchope, 2012). Furthermore, although trades and machinery drivers are not prevalent in the WAPS, these occupations are highly concentrated in some individual departments such as Main Roads or the Department of Transport. The attraction and retention of employees in the WAPS is therefore a significant strategy to be included in agency workforce plans (Wauchope, 2009).

The issue of attracting and retaining professionals in non-metropolitan Australia is widely acknowledged by all levels of government (Miles et al., 2006). It is recognised that regional employees may be different to their metropolitan counterparts because of their lifestyle choices, attitudes to work values and their long-term financial ambitions (Carson et al., 2010). Professional people are increasingly choosing to move from regional, rural and remote areas, with the preference being to take up residency in either the coastal or metropolitan regions (Miles et al., 2006). The motivation to move is stimulated by a range of economic, lifestyle and family factors and the different mix of these factors which are subject to the desires and needs of the individual (Carson et al., 2010).

McKenzie (2001), identified key reasons why skill shortages exist in the regions:

- Rapidly expanding industries;
- Limited infrastructure or services;
- Less diverse culture, activities or lifestyle;
- Limited professional development;
- Variable or seasonal demand for skills, and;
- Low supply of trained staff.

The shortage of skilled talent is a concern to all organisations and the ability to attract, develop and retain talented people will be a critical issue in the future. Managers will be responsible for driving change and heavily involved in developing leadership capabilities, taking a strategic view, “thinking outside

the square” and being tactical. To achieve this, leaders will need to abolish silos, build innovation and develop the physical and virtual technology space by utilising advances in this area (Kramar & Steane, 2012). Organisations therefore, must try to identify what motivates each employee and provide tailored packages or new opportunities within the organisation (Gordon & Lowe, 2002; Nieto, 2008; Rhule, 2004).

It is also recognised that in climates where there is a shortage of skills, organisations are forced to be more aggressive by empowering younger workers and giving them leadership opportunities in an attempt to retain them (Nieto, 2008). The research highlights that leadership style strongly influences both employee wellbeing and other organisational outcomes such as job satisfaction, organisational commitment and turnover intention (Northouse, 2016; Samad et al., 2015).

Many organisations are therefore attempting to become an “employer of choice” to attract and retain talented staff (Boni, 2005; Earle, 2003). An “employer of choice” is defined by Boni (2005, p. 1), as *“an organisation that is recognised for its leadership, culture and best practices that attracts, optimises and retains its pool of skilled employees”*. Companies become recognised as “employers of choice” when they engage in diversity management, become inclusive, provide opportunities for advancement, offer access to continuous learning and allow balance between professional and personal life. Being an “employer of choice” is not about supplying “perks” such as pool tables or the latest technology but improving employee’s quality of life (Earle, 2003).

Research conducted by the Herman Group (cited in Levin, 2007, p. 36) identifies eight criteria for organisations aiming to become “employers of choice”:

1. Company – people want to work for a company that is well-respected;
2. Culture – a culture that empowers and engages employees;
3. Leadership – leaders who are accessible and communicative;
4. Care of people – a respect for a healthy work life balance;
5. Meaningful work – employees want to be challenged and intrigued;
6. Growth and opportunity – ample room for advancement or financial growth;
7. Compensation and benefits – paying attractive premiums to employees, and;
8. Making a difference – employees feel part of something larger than themselves, such as their community.

Koltin (2006) identifies similar attributes for employers of choice but adds risk-taking, that is the “willingness to sacrifice short-term profit for long-term gains”. Earle (2003) similarly notes that while profit funds salaries it is the company culture and the work environment that retain employees, who spend most of their waking lives at work or engaged in work. Organisations can become an “employer of choice” through the provision of flexible work options and corporate support if managers actively implement such policies (Earle, 2003).

### **2.3.1 Summary of employee retention in the regional setting**

Employee retention in the regions is an important consideration for the WAPS given the requirement to provide essential services to the community in a consistent and sustainable manner. The continual changes to economic conditions (Shean, 2010b), altering workforce trends (Roche et al., 2015; Samad et al., 2015) and the impact of people finding the regions as a less attractive place to live (Miles et al., 2006) affect the ability of the organisation to maintain a stable workforce. Strategies to retain employees will need to be

implemented that go beyond financial incentives and benefits. Managers play a critical role in maintaining employee commitment, but this role will need to evolve by taking a strategic view through leadership development and driving change toward practices that focus on the employee and promote the public sector as an “employer of choice”.

## **2.4 Strategic human resource management practices and retention**

Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) involves strategically planning the organisation’s workforce to ensure it focuses on business objectives (Lynch, 2006). It focuses on linking all the people policies with the business strategy (Price, 2004). It may include predicting future labour-market needs, reconciling employee’s career and lifestyle goals with organisational goals, addressing equity or diversity problems, or initiatives to sustain high employee performance (Kramar & Steane, 2012; Lynch, 2006). To maximise the effectiveness of SHRM it is essential organisations examine trends in the external environment, taking a long-term view on how corporate culture, and individual career development align with business strategy (Price, 2004).

Retention is a strategic concern since it enables an organisation to maximise its employee’s skills, knowledge and abilities (Boni, 2005). This will be increasingly important over the next fifteen years given the predicted fifteen percent drop in labour supply expected due to the ageing workforce (Shean, 2010a).

The perspective of the Australian Human Resource Institute (AHRI) has broadened its vision from “people leading business” to “HR with impact” which acknowledges the opportunity that HR specialists are partners in strategy formulation (Kramar & Steane, 2012). This focus on establishing a partnership at the strategy table also involves the further development of an alternative partnership with line managers who are increasingly sharing responsibility with

HR for decisions involving recruitment, training, development, and workforce planning (Kramar & Steane, 2012; Soldan & Nankervis, 2014).

One of the leadership challenges faced by HR and line managers is to integrate four competing values identified by Kramar and Steane (2012) to enhance business performance:

1. **Strategic value** – Building an organisation capable of delivering customer outcomes;
2. **Ethical value** – Doing what is morally right, developing organisational values and individual integrity which includes social responsibility;
3. **Legal value** – Ensuring compliance with legislation and avoiding litigation, and;
4. **Financial value** – Building shareholder wealth with emphasis on cost control and returns on investment.

Line managers have traditionally been responsible for managing the performance of people and are critical in driving employee engagement, performance, commitment to the job, the team and the organisation in delivering the required outcomes (Kramar & Steane, 2012). However, employees are having less contact with HR and more contact with the line managers, who are now responsible for undertaking a range of HR functions including the induction and further development of staff (Kramar & Steane, 2012).

However, there is doubt about the competence of line managers to undertake these activities while solely relying on the HR department as a source to consult with (Kramar & Steane, 2012). As part of this greater business transformation, line managers are becoming more accountable for a range of activities including HR. This will require the development of line managers in a range of skills not only in HR but in other management capabilities that support

the four values identified above. The competencies required of managers to undertake this future role include Kramar and Steane (2012):

- the ability to manage personal differences including those in a diverse workforce;
- an understanding of HR processes;
- persuasion and influencing skills;
- conflict management;
- foster learning;
- collaboration;
- coach;
- team building, and;
- planning skills.

Training is a critical component of higher levels of performance and within this age of constant change, an emphasis on continuing professional development is required to maintain flexibilities in knowledge, intelligence and skills (Tovey & Lawlor, 2004). The establishment of knowledge management practices and the subsequent sharing of this knowledge within an organisation is also required to develop the appropriate skills in individuals (Tovey & Lawlor, 2004).

To be successful the manager will need to transform and have a shift in mindset where accountability is embraced so that these capabilities are continually developed across all hierarchical levels of the organisation (Moolenburgh, 2015; Smith, 2015). Continual training however, has its down sides as training makes employees more marketable and employers must concentrate even more on job satisfaction in order to retain them (Nieto, 2008). The implementation of a regional LDP designed specifically for the needs of regional employees toward being an “employer of choice” may address the retention issues being faced in the regions by shaping the WAPS as a desirable place to work.

Henri Fayol (2013) was one of the first to recognise the need for management education, arguing that all industrial undertakings can be categorised into six groups, technical, commercial, financial, security, accounting and management. In the management group, Fayol (2013) identified that there were fourteen principles of management such as division of work, discipline, span of control, initiative and esprit de corps to name a few. However, he also stressed that the list was non-exhaustive as these principles were flexible and adaptable to every need (Fells, 2000; Iannone, 1989). The principles were supported by five elements of administrative doctrine being:

- Planning – examination of the future and required actions to be taken;
- Organising – establishing the lines of responsibility and authority;
- Coordinating – setting the timing and sequence of activities to ensure harmonization;
- Commanding – putting the set plan into action, and;
- Controlling – conducting monitoring and evaluation of the above established elements (Fayol, 2013).

Many of the ideas that Fayol described in his 1916 (English translation) book are considered part of contemporary management today (Fells, 2000; Iannone, 1989).

Reviewing the above list of capabilities that managers will need to develop, highlights that development is required in both management and leadership capability. Management and leadership are not to be confused as they are a separate set of capabilities (Baban, 2015). Management is related to the business operations and incorporates the formal decision-making position within the organisation (Baban, 2015). Management deals with explicit tools such as planning, budgeting and controlling (Dubrin et al., 2006). Management competencies or tasks include marketing, accounting, information systems (Stone, 2002), and require knowledge of the



administration of the various organisational policies and procedures that support day to day operations (Baban, 2015; Dubrin et al., 2006).

Leadership in contrast to management, involves having a vision of transformation within the organisation, where the leader elicits the cooperation of the team to drive change (Dubrin et al., 2006). Management is being a master of the hard skills, where leadership on the other hand is related to soft skills such as personal values, emotional intelligence, resilience, strategic thinking, communication and relationship management (Bradley et al., 2017).

It is also recognised that leadership can vary within an organisation between the different departments and business units (Northouse, 2016).

Empirical research into effective leadership has established that there are positive outcomes for employees and organisations due to improved employee performance, increased organisational commitment, higher job satisfaction and employee retention (Bradley et al., 2017; Roche et al., 2015; Samad et al., 2015).

#### **2.4.1 Summary of SHRM and retention**

The previous section identified that one of the methods to counteract retention is for organisations to become an employer of choice. To assist in achieving this goal the implementation of SHRM is required to strategically plan for the organisation's workforce needs by ensuring the focus is on aligning people policies with business objectives. The Australian Human Resource Institute identified that business operations are changing whereby the centralised HR department no longer deals with personnel matters with these duties largely falling to line managers who rely on HR for consultation and support. This combined with the empirical research that links leadership style to improved levels of employee engagement, commitment, job satisfaction and retention, support the concept that investment in a regional LDP will assist to address the retention issue in regional WA.

## **2.5 Leadership and SHRM in the WA public sector workforce**

Strong and effective leadership is key to high performance in the public sector. Despite the WAPS workforce participation being relatively steady over the last five years, the workforce has moved from traditional administrative jobs to more professional roles (Wauchope, 2016b). The workforce is mostly occupied by front-line service delivery roles relating to health, education and welfare. Employees are remaining in the workforce longer resulting in an increasingly intergenerational workforce which requires an adjustment in culture as this cross section of generations is accommodated (Shean, 2016; Wauchope, 2016b).

### **2.5.1 Basic demographics**

As the largest employer in WA, the WAPS has 107,809 full time employees, 53% of whom are aged 45 and over, in contrast to only 4% under 24 years of age resulting in a median age of 46.8 years. There is also a gender imbalance with predominately 72.6% of its workforce being female. As at the 30 June 2016, almost 25% (23.8%) of its staff worked in regional locations (Wauchope, 2016b). Between 25% and 50% of the workforce is expected to retire in the next 5 to 10 years (Shean, 2016; Wauchope, 2016b). This is of concern considering that the turnover rate was 13.2% with those leaving having an average tenure of over 8 years of service (Wauchope, 2016b).

### **2.5.2 Public sector leaders**

Public sector leaders are categorized into two classification levels (Table 2.1), the Senior Executive Service (SES) which comprises those leaders responsible for high level decision making, policy advice and oversight and includes the head of an agency. The second classification is the aspiring leader group which comprises those employees holding management and supervisory positions at levels 6 to 8 under the Public Service and Government Officers General Agreement (PSGOGA) 2014 (Wauchope, 2016b).

**Table 2.1 Public sector leaders**

Classification	Male %	Female %	Under 24 yrs. %	Over 45 yrs. %	Work in Region %	Median Age yrs.	Total Employees
WAPS	27.4	72.6	4	53	23.8	46.8	107, 809
SES	66.2	33.8	0	88.4	2.6	54	500
Aspiring	43.7	56.3	0.4	54	13.3	46.3	15, 440

(Derived from Wauchope, 2016b).

Interestingly, only under three percent (2.6%) of SES employees are positioned in regional WA. In regards to gender balance, the SES is predominately male with just over sixty-six percent representation in contrast to the aspiring leaders where this drops to under forty-four percent (43.7%), and continues to drop to just over twenty-five percent (27.4%) for the WAPS as a whole (Wauchope, 2016b). There are 15, 440 aspiring leaders with just over thirteen percent (13.3%) working in the regions. The median age of employees is a concern for all classifications, particularly so given the low numbers of younger people entering the public sector with only four percent being under 24 years of age (Wauchope, 2016b). These age and gender statistics increase the challenges facing leadership within the regions over these large geographical distances.

In respect to the satisfaction rate of leaders, ninety percent are satisfied with their job overall. The satisfaction rate drops to eighty-one percent however when leaders consider their agency as an employer. Overall, eighty-five percent of leaders felt that they were challenged by their work and are proud to work for the WAPS. Leaders also felt that they were empowered to make challenging decisions with eighty-six percent of leaders agreeing that their input is sought or considered and eighty-two percent stating they have the authority to do their job effectively (Wauchope, 2016b).

### 2.5.3 Perceptions of leaders

In the majority, public sector leaders are rated highly by the wider workforce (Table 2.2). In respect to their ethical leadership, eight-five percent of employees agree that their immediate supervisor demonstrates honesty and integrity. Employees also felt that they had a prominent level of ethics with eighty-four percent agreeing that they are encouraged to display ethical behavior (Wauchope, 2016b). Employees felt that leaders were also able to communicate effectively with seventy-nine percent agreeing that their immediate supervisor makes use of appropriate communication (Wauchope, 2016b).

**Table 2.2 Perceptions of leaders**

Classification	Ethical Leader %	Effective Communication %
Immediate Supervisor	85	79
Level above Supervisor	69	63

(Derived from Wauchope, 2016b).

Leaders felt that the combination of these results contributed to higher levels of performance in three key areas, over the last twelve months:

- Innovation – eighty-six percent advised that their workgroup had implemented something innovative;
- Customer Service – ninety-three percent agreed that the workgroup was committed to providing excellent service, and;
- Productivity – ninety-one percent felt the workgroup achieved an elevated level of productivity (Wauchope, 2016b).

### 2.5.4 Current leadership development in the WAPS

The aging SES, average mean age 54 years: (Wauchope, 2016b) has forced agencies to shift their attention to developing leadership capabilities of younger employees via succession planning. Leadership development often occurs at the local level with attention centered on growing leaders in the context of their

own agency and potential future roles. As such leadership development occurs differently across each agency with only a few having some form of formalised program. In the most part aspiring leaders are developed internally with the following methodology being applied:

- Focus effort on the capabilities that are most critical to agency performance;
- Identify and develop early-in-career leaders;
- Value both horizontal and vertical leadership progression;
- Take a team as well as an individual view of leadership development, and;
- Address systematic barriers to the progression of leaders and apply consistency where possible (Wauchope, 2016b).

There are a few formalized options for those in the SES membership having access to external development in the form of the Executive Fellows program delivered by the Australian and New Zealand School of Government (ANZSOG) or through University courses such as the Executive Masters of Public Administration qualification which is a two year part time post graduate course (Wauchope, 2016b). In most instances, the agency sponsors the SES member to participate in the course paying for all related expenses. The ability to participate and gain sponsorship is limited.

Due to the lack of standardization, the variety of approaches taken by individual agencies and the limited formalised options available, there is the potential for a regional specific LDP to address the current shortfall in leadership development opportunities.

### **2.5.5 Summary of the public sector workforce**

This section has highlighted the significant “aging workforce” issue that is currently facing the WAPS, with the potential of twenty-five to fifty percent of the workforce able to retire in the next five to ten years. A continuing high

turnover rate of almost fifteen percent (13.2%) which is occurring at an average tenure of eight years results in substantial knowledge management issues.

The previous sections have highlighted the impacts of retention and the general trend that the regions are becoming a less attractive option to live in. As almost twenty-five percent of the WAPS workforce is based in the regions, retention is a significant concern.

Current leadership development is sporadic across the WAPS with most development opportunities being available at the local level through non-formal processes. The opportunity exists for a regional LDP to be created to assist in improving leadership capability in the regions and enticing employees to remain in the regions.

## **LEADERSHIP THEORY, ITS NATURE IN AUSTRALIA AND ITS REGIONAL AREAS**

### **2.6 Theories of leadership**

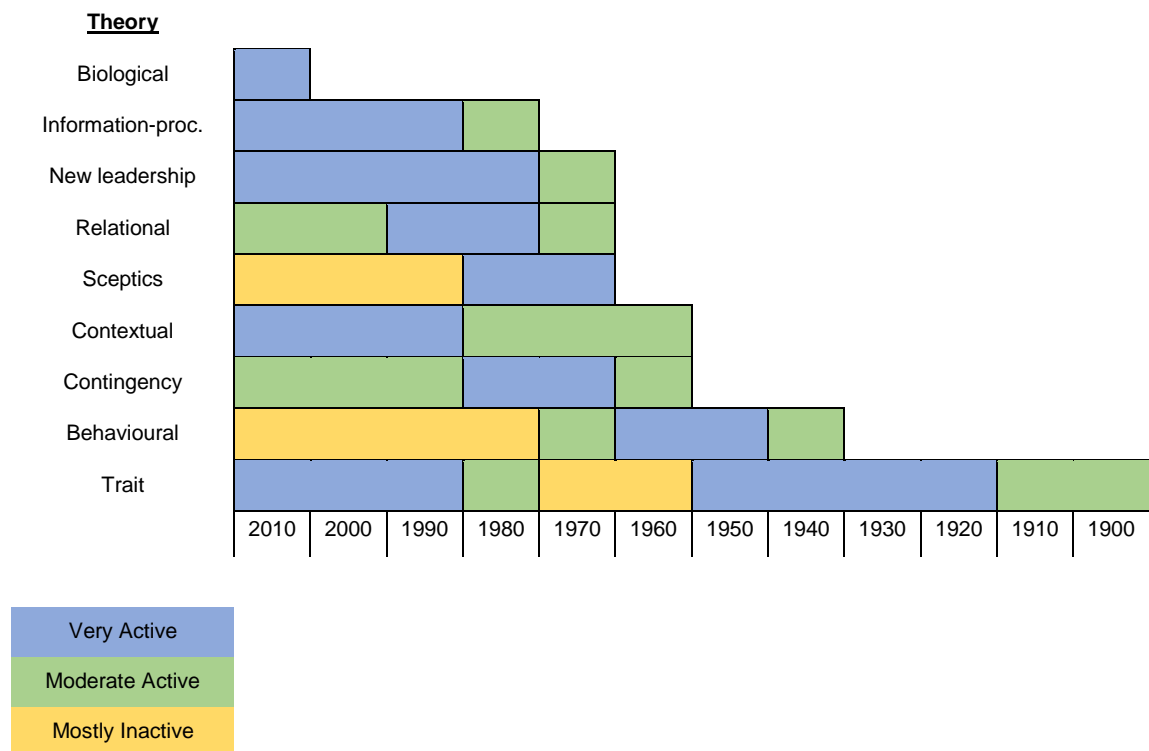
There is a huge body of research on the topic of leadership, with over 35,000 papers, magazine articles and books, mostly drawn from American or Western European business and political disciplines in the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Ashkanasy & Falkus, 1998; Dubrin et al., 2006; Yee Kok, Ashkanasy, & Hartel, 2003). Leadership is a complex and diverse topic. Many authors claim there is no single form of leadership that is always successful, rather leadership depends on several factors including the situation, the followers, the culture, the possibility of fostering a common identity or set of values, and the leader's characteristics (Day & Antonakis, 2012; Marques, 2006; Pero & Smith, 2008; Yee Kok et al., 2003).

A definition of leadership is provided by Hersey and Blanchard (1993, p. 5) as “the process of influencing the activities of an individual or a group in efforts toward goal achievement in a given situation”. In this definition, the distinction is made between leadership and management, whereby management is a specific form of leadership in which the achievement of organisational goals is paramount. In defining leadership the key differential is the organisation and as such a leader may provide influence toward their own goals, those of the group or for some other purpose which therefore may not be congruent with the organisations goals (Hersey & Blanchard, 1993). This research will examine leadership rather than management as this provides greater capability for the public sector when considering a regional environment.

Scholarly studies of leadership have developed over the past century, with Day and Antonakis (2012) dividing leadership research into nine schools. These schools being:

1. Trait theory;
2. Behavioural theory;
3. Contingency theory;
4. Contextual theory;
5. Sceptics of leadership;
6. Relational theory;
7. New leadership school;
8. Information processing school, and;
9. Biological / Evolutionary.

These theories were classified by two dimensions being temporal (i.e. when the school emerged) and productivity (i.e. the extent to which the research school has attracted attention). Figure 2.2 illustrates the cycle of research interest in these theories from the 1900's until 2010 (Day & Antonakis, 2012).



(Derived from Day & Antonakis, 2012).

## Figure 2.2 Major schools of leadership

The theories predominately focus on the hierarchical view whereby the leader is the “hero”, that is, a top-down approach where the “one” leader is acknowledged by the many (Bradley et al., 2017; Brown & Bourke, 2017; Minaee, 2014; Samad et al., 2015). However, there are alternative schools of thought or post-heroic approaches (shared, collective, dispersed) which are more democratic styles of leadership in which work outcomes and social influence is shared amongst the various group members (Bradley et al., 2017; Minaee, 2014; Samad et al., 2015). Some of the various leadership theories are explored in greater detail below.

### 2.6.1 The Trait Theory

The trait school of leadership theory has the longest history commencing in the early 1900's. This theory studied the traits that made certain people great



leaders and is also known today as the “Great Man Theory” (Day & Antonakis, 2012). This view focussed on identifying the qualities and characteristics of leaders where it was believed that an innate phenomenon occurred where leaders were born with these qualities and thus obtained their leadership position as a result. This research claimed that the traits were pivotal to the leadership process and that those who could mimic these traits would be effective leaders (Day & Antonakis, 2012; Dubrin et al., 2006; Northouse, 2016).

This theory was challenged in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century particularly around the universality of these traits but has earned new interest through the relationship it has with visionary and charismatic leadership theories. Despite the swings toward or against trait theory over the past century, there continues to be a persuasive argument that leaders differ to non-leaders with the separation being postulated that leaders do possess certain characteristics which they are either born with, learn over time or both. There have been many studies that have occurred with some of the main studies commenced by Stogdill in 1948 through to more recent study by Zaccaro, Kemp and Bader in 2004. These studies provide an extensive list of leader traits and characteristics. Some of the traits that are commonly identified include intelligence, self-confidence, determination, integrity and sociability (Dubrin et al., 2006; Northouse, 2016).

Despite the long history and support of this theory through this extensive research, it has several weaknesses, the main being the never-ending list of traits which have been ambiguous, uncertain and in some instances contradictory. This uncertainty could result from the theories failure to consider the situational factors present while the leader was displaying these traits and links to the reason why a leader may not continue to maintain their leadership position over time (Dubrin et al., 2006; Northouse, 2016).

In respect to the strengths of this theory, the main one is that it is appealing to people’s ideas and needs, in that a “leader” is one person who is out the front

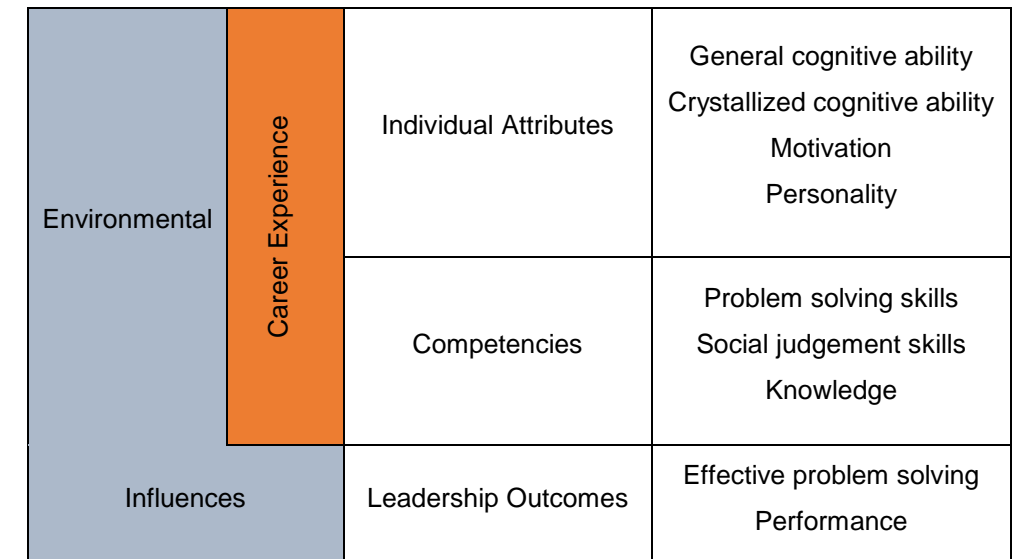
and has the gift to achieve extraordinary things. This is supported by a breadth and depth of research that has been conducted for over a century which provides credibility and is a further strength for this theory. Although the wider research on leadership confirms that it is an interaction of leaders, followers and the situation, the trait approach has provided a greater understanding of how personality relates to the process of leadership (Dubrin et al., 2006; Northouse, 2016).

### **2.6.2 The Skills Approach**

The skills approach is still a leader-centred perspective like the trait theory, however there is a shift from personality characteristics toward the skills, knowledge and abilities that are required of a successful leader. In this respect, it attempts to address some of the complexities faced in the training and development of the traits theory. This approach was first developed by Robert Katz in 1955 where he identified three basic administrative skills: technical, human and conceptual which are required to solve the complexities operating within organisations (Northouse, 2016). A leader is required to hold all three skills which vary according to the hierarchical position held in the organisation, i.e. top management require more human and conceptual skills whereas supervisor's need to focus on more technical based skills. These skills can be learned and developed more readily than changing an individual's personality traits (Northouse, 2016).

Despite this early start by Katz, the skills approach received more research attention during the early 1990's with Mumford, Zaccaro, Harding, Jacobs and Fleishman expanding this to incorporate 5 components within the Skills Model of Leadership and includes: competencies, individual attributes, leadership outcomes, career experience and environmental influences as indicated in Figure 2.3. This model supports the notion that leadership skills are developed over time, becoming more evolved as the leader progresses through the hierarchal layers and engages with more complex issues. The model provides

a road map for how a leader can reach effective leadership through the development of these skills (Northouse, 2016).



(Derived from Mumford, Zaccaro, Harding, Jacobs, & Fleishman, 2000).

**Figure 2.3 Skills Model of Leadership**

The popularity of this approach comes with several criticisms, particularly through the inclusion of so many components which incorporate other disciplines, such as psychology (e.g. motivation). This goes beyond the leadership scope and makes the model more generalist in nature. The approach also claims to be skills based, being separate to the trait theory, however the inclusion of the individual attributes starts to blur the borders particularly with the inclusion of broad factors such as personality, cognitive ability and motivation all of which can be related to trait based characteristics (Northouse, 2016).

The skills approach stresses the importance of developing leadership through acquired skills across the differing levels of the hierarchy which makes it appealing as anyone can become a leader with the right experience and

development. This is unlike trait theory where it is difficult to alter one's psychological makeup. The model also provides a very detailed view of leadership which incorporates a wide variety of components and acknowledges other factors such as the follower and the situation which are not necessarily found in other theories of leadership (Northouse, 2016).

### **2.6.3 Style Approach**

The style approach focuses on what the leaders do and how they act towards subordinates in various contexts. It considers two general kinds of behaviour, task based, and relationship based, and how they combine to influence followers in goal achievement. The Leadership Grid by Blake and Mouton, 1964 is the most well-known model in this genre of leadership. The grid has two intersecting axes the horizontal representing task result and the vertical representing the relationship with people (Dubrin et al., 2006; Northouse, 2016). The Leadership Grid has a 9-point scale portraying five leadership styles, Figure 2.4:

1. Impoverished management (1,1);
2. Authority-Compliance (9,1);
3. Country-club management (1,9);
4. Middle of the road management (5,5);
5. Team management (9,9).

One of the biggest issues with this theory is that researchers have not been able to identify consistent links between task and relationship behaviours and the impacts these have on job satisfaction, morale and productivity. The other concern with this theory is that it has failed to establish what it set out to achieve which was, a universal style that could be effective in most situations. This is like the outcomes of trait theory where the theory has been unable to identify the behaviours that are associated with effective leadership (Dubrin et al., 2006; Northouse, 2016).

Concern for people	High					
	9	Country Club				Team
	7					
	5			Middle of the Road		
	3					
	1	Impoverished				Authority-Compliance
	Low	1	3	5	7	9
		Concern for results				
		High				

(Derived from Blake & Mouton, 1985).

**Figure 2.4 Leadership Grid**


The styles approach broadened leadership research from the traits of leaders and assessed what leaders do and how they act. A multitude of research supports the approach as a viable theory toward understanding the leadership process (Northouse, 2016). The theory identified that the leader's style consists primarily of two behaviours being task, and relationship which is at the core of the leadership process. In a leadership development perspective, it can be utilised as a tool for the leader to assess how they come across to followers and improve their leadership style by altering their task or relationship orientation (Dubrin et al., 2006; Northouse, 2016).

#### 2.6.4 Situational Approach

The situational leadership approach is one of the more widely recognised theories of leadership, being refined and revised since inception by Hersey and Blanchard in 1969. The basis of the theory is that different situations require distinct kinds of leadership and the leader must adapt to suit the situation. Like the "styles approach" which had task and relationship behaviour as the core of the theory, situational leadership is comprised of both a directive and supportive dimension with each being applied appropriately in each situation. In using this theory, the leader assesses the followers on their

competence and commitment to the task at hand and then alters their relationship basis to be either directive or supportive to meet the changing needs of the follower. The model identifies four leadership styles which the leader matches against the situation after considering the development level of the follower. The development level of the follower is based on commitment and competence with D1 being high commitment and low competence through to D4 being high commitment and high competence (Dubrin et al., 2006; Northouse, 2016). Figure 2.5 depicts the Situational Leadership model developed by Blanchard, Zigarmi, and Zigarmi (1985).

The Four Leadership Styles			
High	<i>Directive Behaviour</i>		High
<i>Supportive Behaviour</i>	Supporting High supportive Low Directive	Coaching High Supportive High Directive	<i>Supportive Behaviour</i>
	Delegating High supportive Low Directive	Directing Low supportive High Directive	
Low	<i>Directive Behaviour</i>		High

The Development level of followers			
High	Moderate		Low
D4	D3	D2	D1
Developed			Developing

(Derived from Blanchard et al., 1985)

**Figure 2.5 Situational Leadership Model**

Notwithstanding such resounding support for the model, the main criticism is that only a few research studies have been completed to justify the assumptions provided in the model. This combined with the reliance on the

leader to assess the competence level of the follower against the four development levels provides concern as the model does not explain the commitment versus competence categorisation well. The model also does not account for certain demographic characteristics such as the level of education or the job experience of the follower (Dubrin et al., 2006; Northouse, 2016).

Situational leadership is well known and frequently used in the development of leaders within organisations mainly due to its practicality. It is easy to understand and apply to a variety of situations and industry settings. The simplicity of the model and the descriptions of each leadership style enables leaders to assess the capabilities and development level of followers and easily apply the appropriate leadership style to match (Dubrin et al., 2006; Northouse, 2016).

### **2.6.5 Contingency Theory**

Contingency theory is a leader-match theory which attempts to match leaders to appropriate situations. It is contingent on the leader's style matching the situation with leader's effectiveness enhancing if the style fits the context and setting. The most recognised researcher in this area is Fiedler who commenced this research during the 1960's and was able to make empirically grounded generalisations about which styles suited an organisational context or situation. In this framework, leadership styles are task motivated or relationship motivated and are measured by the Least Preferred Co-worker (LPC) scale (Day & Antonakis, 2012; Dubrin et al., 2006; Northouse, 2016).

Like the "styles approach" which had task and relationship behaviour as the core of the theory, contingency theory leaders are primarily task motivated if they are concerned with reaching a goal whereas those who focus on interpersonal relationships are relationship motivated. The theory also categorizes situations into three factors: leader-member relations, task structure and position power. The theory measures the LPC score and the three situational variables and by this measurement, the leader can ascertain

their level of effectiveness in a particular setting. Once the nature of the situation is determined, the leader fit can be evaluated, with the correct style resulting in leadership success. Like others, this theory highlights that leaders are not effective in all situations (Dubrin et al., 2006; Northouse, 2016).

The theory has a major concern regarding the LPC scale as it does not seem valid on the surface as it is difficult to complete correctly and does not correlate to other leadership measures. In this regard, the scale measures a person's leadership style by asking the person to characterise another person's behaviour, as such it is difficult to ascertain how the description of another person on the scale reflects their own leadership style. Confusion can result in completing the LPC as the instructions are not clear and workers can end up answering the questions from the perspective of the least liked co-worker as opposed to the least preferred co-worker (Dubrin et al., 2006; Northouse, 2016).

Contingency theory has several strengths particularly in broadening our view on leadership by considering the situation and the impacts that may result, shifting the emphasis of leadership from the best type of leadership to consideration of the link between the leader and the situation at hand. It is a predictive model which enables the situation to be assessed and the most effective type of leader to be selected to deal with the circumstances. This aspect also highlights that a leader cannot lead in all circumstances with organisations having the flexibility to move the leader to suit the correct situation or alter the situation to match their leadership style (Dubrin et al., 2006; Northouse, 2016).

#### **2.6.6 Path-Goal Theory**

This theory first appeared in the early 1970's and considers how leaders motivate subordinates to accomplish designated goals. The theory has a stated goal being "to enhance follower performance and follower satisfaction by focusing on follower motivation" (Northouse, 2016, p. 115). The theory



emphasises the relationship between the leader's style and the characteristics of the subordinates in the work setting. It incorporates expectancy theory and suggests that employee motivation is stimulated if they think they can perform the work, their effort will result in a certain outcome and if they believe the payoff for doing the work is worthwhile. Based on this understanding the leader adopts a style that is suited to enhancing the subordinate's motivational needs towards goal attainment which is achieved by providing information or rewards in the work environment. Path-Goal theory works on the complex interplay between the leader behaviour, subordinate's characteristics, task characteristics and the subordinate's motivation (Dubrin et al., 2006; Northouse, 2016).

The theory's premise is that leaders motivate when the path to the goal is clear, easy to navigate, obstacles are removed, the work is personally satisfying, and employees are supported by coaching and direction. The theory identifies several leader behaviours (Dubrin et al., 2006; Northouse, 2016).

1. Directive leadership – leader sets clear standards of performance and makes the rules and regulations clear to subordinates;
2. Supportive leadership – leader goes out of their way to make the work pleasant for the subordinate who is treated as an equal;
3. Participative leadership – leader invites subordinates to share in the decision-making process by consulting with them, obtaining their ideas and integrating suggestions into the final decision, and;
4. Achievement-Orientated leadership – leader challenges the subordinates to perform work at the highest possible level by setting a high standard and seeking continuous improvement. A high degree of confidence is placed in the subordinates to accomplish the goal.

The biggest weakness of the theory is its complexity as it incorporates so many different aspects, which can lead to confusion on behalf of the leader to decipher what leadership style is appropriate for the task, which has a differing

degree of structure across goals with various levels of clarity whilst considering the capability of the workers to achieve the goal (Dubrin et al., 2006; Northouse, 2016).

This theory provides a useful theoretical framework for understanding how leader behaviours affect subordinate's satisfaction and work performance by established four distinct varieties of leadership and expanding the focus on previous research which had identified task and relationship orientated behaviours. It also is the first theory that considers employee motivation and keeps this in the forefront of the leader's mind (Dubrin et al., 2006; Northouse, 2016).

#### **2.6.7 Leader-Member Exchange Theory (Relational School)**

Leader-member exchange (LMX) theory takes an alternative approach to those seen previously which have primarily focussed on the leader, the follower or the situation / context. This theory focusses on the process in which interactions between leaders and individual followers are viewed, contrasting previous research which assumed that followers were dealt with in a collective way using an averaged leadership approach (Day & Antonakis, 2012). This theory identified that a leader developed individualised relationships with followers who were either part of an in-group (those that had negotiated extended role responsibility) or those who were part of the out-group (those who had defined roles based on the formal contract of employment) (Dubrin et al., 2006; Northouse, 2016).

The separation of the team into these groups is simply based on how well the leader and individual follower work together and thus personality characteristics are related to this process. The ability for an individual to move from the out-group to the in-group is centred on how they involve themselves in expanding their role and developing the personal relationship. If the follower is willing to do more than the standard requirements of the job then they have

the capability to become part of the in-group (Dubrin et al., 2006; Northouse, 2016).

The theory also addresses how this relationship affects organisational factors such as employee turnover, positive performance outcomes, job satisfaction and higher commitment levels. Researchers established that high-quality leader-member exchanges produced positive outcomes in these aspects. In addition, not surprisingly, those members of the in-group benefited by obtaining more desirable work assignments, gaining increased frequency of promotion and faster career progression. As a result of these inequities, the theory identifies that relationships should be made with all employees in an attempt to make them feel part of the in-group, thus avoiding being part of the out-group. To move from the out-group to the in-group, the theory identifies that the relationship must develop progressively over time going through three distinct phases: the stranger, the acquaintance and the mature partnership stage (Dubrin et al., 2006; Northouse, 2016).

The biggest weakness of this theory is that it runs contrary to the most basic human value of fairness. The existence of distinct and separate groups who are treated differently may have undesirable effects on the group if it is not carefully administered. The biggest strength of this theory is that it is intuitive to most people as everyone has experienced the in and out groups within a working environment which enables it to be a strong descriptive theory. It validates the reality of workplaces and highlights the relationship as the centre point of the leadership process which is contrary to other approaches which have focussed on the leader traits, followers and circumstances or combinations of these (Dubrin et al., 2006; Northouse, 2016).

### **2.6.8 Transformational Leadership**

Transformational leadership is perhaps the most influential modern theory, being developed by Burns in 1978. In this theory, Burns compared Transactional and Transformational Leadership. Transactional leadership is

characterised by a relationship between leaders and followers based on “exchange” of work for rewards or avoidance of punishments (Alexander, 2010; Davies, 2007; Day & Antonakis, 2012; Dubrin et al., 2006; Minaee, 2014; Northouse, 2016). This style can be observed in almost all types of employment relations, although its effects are transitory and once the transaction is completed there is little to keep the parties engaged. It relies heavily on the hierarchical authority to sanction the rewards / punishment, making employees subordinates with limited independence (Alexander, 2010; Davies, 2007; Dubrin et al., 2006; Northouse, 2016).

In contrast, transformational leadership aims to alter the status quo by evoking a sense of greater purpose amongst a group, stimulating followers “morals and values” and raising them to a higher purpose (Alexander, 2010; Davies, 2007; Day & Antonakis, 2012; Dubrin et al., 2006; Minaee, 2014). The leader attends to the employee’s psychological needs, providing stimulation by raising the follower’s needs to the next level through Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. This is not a top-down approach but can occur at any level of an organisation where team members have ownership of a project (Davies, 2007; Northouse, 2016).

The traditional version of transformational leadership identified four types of leader behaviour (Minaee, 2014; Northouse, 2016):

1. **Individualised consideration** – caring for the employee’s individual needs;
2. **Intellectual stimulation** – having activity that enables creativity;
3. **Inspirational motivation** – development of an inspiring vision related to the work performed, and;
4. **Idealised influence** – the role modelling of psychologically mature and moral values.

Dubrin et al. (2006) extended this view and describe some of the transformations as:

- Raising people's awareness;
- Helping people look beyond self-interest;
- Helping people search for self-fulfillment;
- Helping people understand the need for change;
- Investing management with a sense of urgency;
- Committing to high moral goals, and;
- Adoption of a long-term broad perspective.

House et al. (1998) expanded this concept into Values-based Leadership theory, whereby the "exchange" between leader and follower is based on a leader's behaviour and motive profile - their disposition towards power, achievement, affiliation or moral responsibility. The creation of a vision is common for transformational leaders as this becomes the focal point of where the organisation is headed and provides clarity and meaning for followers (Northouse, 2016).

For House et al. (1998) a leader who endorses values congruent with those of followers and cultural norms is an effective leader. In this transformation followers and leaders are inextricably bound together and leaders can influence followers on a one-to-one level, to entire teams and even cultures. This model has also been found as an effective leadership style in many cultures outside Western nations (House et al., 1998; Northouse, 2016).

The model uses the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) to appraise leaders by measuring the follower's perceptions of the leader's behaviour for each of the factors. It is available in both a self-assessment and a follower format which enables the leader to think about their own styles of leadership against those of followers (Dubrin et al., 2006; Northouse, 2016).

Although the above comments suggest that the theory has resounding support, several weaknesses have been identified particularly in relation to the

concept's clarity. It is difficult to define the boundaries of transformational leadership because it covers a wide range of activities such as a vision, motivating employees, an agent of change, building trust, and acting as a social architect within the organisation (Northouse, 2016). It treats leadership as a trait and relies heavily on charisma as a personal disposition, the transformational leader out front having a "heroic" quality that "transforms" followers, which reinforces the trait aspect within the theory. If this is the case then this makes the development of leaders difficult as traits are harder to change than something that can be learned over time through exposure to a range of experiences (Dubrin et al., 2006; Northouse, 2016). Transformational leadership also has the potential to have a dark side where the leader could abuse the position and manipulate the vision toward unethical, immoral or illegal outcomes (Dubrin et al., 2006; Johnson, 2009; Northouse, 2016).

Transformational leadership provides an approach that incorporates other leadership models such as reward exchange and the leader-follower relationship. Its popularity stems from being intuitive as it treats leadership as a process between leaders and followers where the needs, values and morals of others are central. It also meets peoples' need for a person out the front championing change for others. The emphasis on a moral dimension sets the approach apart from other leadership styles and discounts models that have coercive uses of power. Finally, there is substantial evidence that this theory is effective as employee satisfaction, motivation and performance have been found to have positive correlations in a variety of situations (Northouse, 2016).

#### **2.6.9 Shared and Team Leadership**

In shared leadership, one leader does not exercise greater influence over other members unless it suits the team's needs. Responsibility for the group is shared with each member having a direct investment in the success of the team outcomes. This theory relies on regular communication between members, the recognition of specialist expertise within the team and a

collective authority over processes which were traditionally held by the hierarchical leader (Dubrin et al., 2006; Minaee, 2014; Northouse, 2016).

The theory identifies a clear distinction between a team and a group of employees, whereby the team shares a common commitment and accomplishes collective work. In contrast, a group might perform slightly more independent work which is controlled by a distinct leader. In the team, there is individual but mutual accountability whereas in the group scenario accountability is purely individualised (Dubrin et al., 2006).

Shared leadership is commonly seen in IT, creative design, professional groups, health and service based industries and is mostly referred to as a self-managed work group (SMWG). In these groups, the person most qualified takes charge of the task and the leader changes as different skills are required. As such, the “leader” relies on the tacit recognition of colleagues rather than the formal authority of a single person (Dubrin et al., 2006; Minaee, 2014; Northouse, 2016).

Shared leadership is related to the concepts of participative decision making and empowerment, whereby the team members are included in decisions to varying degrees however the formal leader retains final authority. In these arrangements group members have varying authority to problem solve, make decisions and determine the work conditions. Success for SMWG's occurs when mediation, monitoring of progress and the effectiveness of the team are integrated at the appropriate mix (Minaee, 2014; Northouse, 2016).

Shared leadership does have some limitations, in that it has not been completely supported or tested with questions raised about the team patterns and how they progress over time, group cycles, authority issues and content issues such as new group, mature group or deteriorating teams (Northouse, 2016).

Group decision making offers many advantages over individual effort particularly where good synergy exists within the team. Members within the team often evaluate thinking which creates innovative practices, provides continuous improvement and minimises risk due to the ability of the team to better identify major errors (Dubrin et al., 2006). This joint approach also supports the notion of the leader as a medium or processor of incoming information performing the critical function of diagnostic assessment and disseminator to the team who then take the appropriate action, with the leader switching to the team member best placed to take the necessary action (Dubrin et al., 2006; Northouse, 2016).

#### **2.6.10 Authentic Leadership**

Authentic leadership is one of the newest concepts of leadership, focussing on whether leadership is genuine and real. It is still in its formative stages of development and is likely to change as more research on the theory is made available (Northouse, 2016). It is a post global financial crisis style of leadership which incorporates transformational and ethical leadership (Davis, 2014; Duignan, 2015; Samad et al., 2015). Interest in the theory has been influenced by recent world events such as the 9/11 terrorist attack, failures in the banking industry, and corporate scandals which have created a world of fear and uncertainty. As a result, people are looking for leaders that they can trust and who are honest in their dealings, this in turn has increased the demand and focus on this aspect of leadership (Johnson, 2009; Northouse, 2016). An authentic leader is someone who accepts organisational and personal responsibility for actions, outcomes and mistakes and is non manipulating of subordinates (Duignan, 2015).

Despite this recent attention to seek authentic leaders, it was first identified during the transformational leadership research conducted by Burns but was never fully reviewed. Amongst scholars there is no single accepted definition of this approach which mainly stems from the two distinct approaches that exist: the practical approach (based on real life examples) and the theoretical



approach (based on social science research). Authentic leadership can be viewed from three viewpoints:

- Intrapersonal – focusses on the leader and what goes on within the leader incorporating self-knowledge, self-regulation and self-concept. It relies on the life story of the leader and the meaning the leader attaches to his or her life experience;
- Developmental – identifies that authentic leadership is something that can be nurtured in a leader and developed over a lifetime triggered by major events rather than being a fixed trait. In this view, there are four distinct but related components: self-awareness, internalized moral perspective, balanced processing and relational transparency;
- Interpersonal – is created by leaders and followers together through the reciprocal interactions they have. Leaders affect followers as much as followers affect leaders. The leader needs to obtain buy-in from their followers and success will only occur once followers identify with the concept or accept the values espoused by the leader (Northouse, 2016).

Authentic leaders can be participative, directive or authoritative depending on the situation the leader finds themselves in (Samad et al., 2015). This approach tends to show a stronger focus on the individual's potential or ability to continue to learn, grow and develop. Qualities to look for include curiosity, insight, engagement and determination (Smith, 2015). The ability to be reflective and engage in self-leadership is a key to authentic leadership (Day & Antonakis, 2012; Duignan, 2015; Johnson, 2009). Understanding oneself is the prerequisite for understanding others and acts as the foundation for allowing others to act with independence while modelling best practice (Bradley et al., 2017; Johnson, 2009).

The most identifiable weakness is the limited substantiation of the theory both in its empirical basis and in testing for validity. The theory is exposed in respect

to the moral component as it is not fully explained how higher-order values function to influence the leader's self-awareness, the balancing of processes or the transparency in relationships. Finally, it is not clear how the authenticity of a leader relates to positive organisational outcomes. Authenticity is important for good leadership but will a leader adopting this style be effective if they lack skills identified in previous leadership theories such as being organised or having technical competence. Further research on the correlation between authentic leadership and organisational outcomes is required (Northouse, 2016).

One of the strengths of authentic leadership is that it fulfils an expressed need for people's distrust of modern organisations, by filling the void with trustworthy leaders. In this respect, a leader needs to work with followers to ascertain what is really going on in a situation whilst having self-awareness, a moral perspective and balance process with relationship transparency. The underlying principal is that leaders need to have a good moral compass making decisions that will be good for followers and the community at large. In a development perspective, authentic leadership recognises that leaders develop over time due to the circumstances and relationships they experience (Day & Antonakis, 2012; Johnson, 2009; Northouse, 2016).

#### **2.6.11 The Ethical Leader**

More recent research identifies a growing focus on global leadership, intercultural awareness, citizenship and community engagement which integrate previous theories of leadership as a hybrid approach (Davis, 2014; Moolenburgh, 2015; Smith, 2015). Today a new type of leader is required, one that can not only lead a team but who can build the team, keep people connected, engage and drive a culture of innovation, learning and continuous improvement with a diverse contingent workforce that includes contractors and sub-contractors (Brown & Bourke, 2017; Burke, 2004).

Avery, Bell, Hilb, and Witte (2004) grouped leadership paradigms into four categories of typology being classical, transactional, visionary and organic style to describe the leadership construct and provide context to the changing organisational and individual requirements. Under this typology, classical refers to the dominance of a person who commands others towards the goal and is reflective of the classifications 1-6 provided by (Day & Antonakis, 2012). The transactional paradigm follows Burn's theory mentioned above whereby it is a negotiation of the task completion in exchange for extrinsic rewards.

The visionary paradigm focusses on the desired future state and attempts to engage with followers to obtain commitment toward the future vision leveraging off theories that are based in transformational leadership. This contrasts with the organic paradigm which groups those theories explored in more recent research that allows for multiple leaders to change to suit the needs of the challenges being faced by the team. Here people alternate the leadership role allowing the responsibility to change as needed (Zhang, C. Avery, Bergsteiner, & More, 2014).

This has given rise to a different focus on leadership whereby strong ethical and social principles are becoming highlighted in university executive programs. Topics in these programs include aspects such as climate change, environmental sustainability, cross-cultural leadership, leading remote teams and corporate social responsibility (Davis, 2014). The focus on these topics transposes as a need for leaders to be more transparent, accountable and compassionate.

Ethics concerns the leaders' actions, conduct and character whereas leadership ethics is concerned with the leaders' behaviour and the virtue of guided decision making. In practice, this involves the leader being responsible for the ethical behaviour of others in the organisation by promoting ethical decisions in their followers in addition to managing their own moral behaviour

(Johnson, 2009; Northouse, 2016). There are five base principals for the development of ethical leadership:

- Respect Others – this includes giving value to other people’s ideas and nurturing their needs, values and purposes. It means listening, showing empathy and being tolerant to opposing points of view;
- Serve Others – this includes engaging in behaviours such as mentoring, empowerment, team building and citizenship. In practice, the leader is follower focused placing other’s interests foremost and acting in ways that benefit others;
- Show Justice – a concern for fairness and justice, where followers are treated equally, with no one person receiving special treatment or consideration unless the particular situation demands it;
- Manifest Honesty – Dishonest leaders are not dependable and are unreliable. By failing to provide the truth to employees, the leader is straining the relationship as it indicates that the person is unable to deal with the information. Honesty is not just telling the truth it is being open and presenting the reality as fully and completely as possible;
- Builds Community – this involves considering the purpose of everyone involved in the group whilst being considerate of the community interest and culture. Ideally, the mutual goals of the leader and follower should emulate the community goal and purpose ensuring that the public interest is met (Northouse, 2016).

#### **2.6.12 Summary of leadership theories**

In this section, the various leadership theories have been explored and as can be seen from the literature, leadership is a complex and diverse topic. The review of the various theories highlights that there is no single form of leadership rather it relies on a complex interaction of the leader, followers, organisational culture, the tasks being performed and the situation. Most of the theories presented focused on the hierarchical view where the leader was the talented and gifted hero of the situation, however more democratic styles

were observed toward the end of the review where social influence has started to shape leadership behaviours. A leadership development program designed for the regions will need to consider how the various theories may be incorporated into the content.

## **2.7 Leadership in the Australian Context**

Although leadership rests on universal values, national or cultural variations also exist (McGrath-Champ & Searle, 2005; McKenzie, 2001; Nabben, 2011; Yee Kok et al., 2003). The nature of leadership in Australia has been extensively researched in Government reports by Kelty (1993), McKinsey (1994) and Karpin (1995), all finding that Australia lacked the leadership skills needed to remain competitive in the global economic environment (Karpin, 1995; McGrath-Champ & Searle, 2005; Nabben, 2011; Yee Kok et al., 2003).

Karpin (1995, p. 4) highlights “it appears incontrovertible that Australian enterprises, training providers and educational institutions are not moving quickly enough to address the new paradigm of management. Many of their counterparts overseas and especially the leaders in various fields of industry and education are changing more rapidly and more extensively and will be better prepared for the next century”. Karpin (1995) highlights that leadership is lacking due to the rapid changes in markets and the nature of enterprises being reshaped through increased globalisation, widespread technological innovation and pressure on businesses to customise products and services. Organisations are also being reshaped with a move away from structural organisations toward behavioural aspects, where speed, flexibility and innovation are becoming more prevalent.

Only a small number of academic studies have examined differences between leadership in Australia and other countries, mostly in the use of transactional vs. transformational styles (Alexander, 2010; Pero & Smith, 2008; Yee Kok et al., 2003). Expectations of leadership in Australia appear to contain unique

cultural influences: For example, Parry and Sarros (1996) found considerable cultural and behavioural differences between American and Australian perceptions of effective leadership.

The values that define an Australian leader may stem from the nation's predominately Anglo-Saxon history as a convict and frontier settlement Pini (2003) suggests such characteristics as heroism, physical and emotional toughness, and self-reliance. These are reinforced by the language of executive culture, often invoked in sporting or military terms (Pini, 2003). Other values are reflected in the "tall poppy syndrome", the Australian inclination to criticize or denigrate high achievers who may not deserve their status or build excessive self-esteem on it (Feather, 1989, 1994).

Some studies have investigated the "Australian-ness" of leadership through international comparisons, several of these empirical cross-cultural studies will be explored further.

Parry and Sarros (1996) found that for Australians charisma is based on strong values of egalitarianism and individualised consideration, while in the United States it rested on idealised influence, inspirational motivation and intellectual stimulation.

Ashkanasy and Falkus (1998) found that Australian culture presented an enigmatic or even contradictory attitude to leaders in the eyes of followers. They identified four paradoxical values enabling Australian leaders to inspire high levels of performance whilst not being overly charismatic or standing out in front of the crowd:

1. Mateship;
2. Being "one of us";
3. Empathy for the underdog, and;
4. Dislike for "tall poppies".

For Ashkanasy and Falkus (1998) these qualities distinguish Australian leaders from American leaders, who are highly individualised, and Chinese leaders, who are highly collective.

A number of studies have compared Australian and Asian leadership. Wang (2004) found Chinese leaders held high positional power and authority based on a strict hierarchical structure, while Australian leaders were expected to treat subordinates with more equality or even mateship, and to display less orderly, informal behaviours to foster innovation.

Casimir and Waldman (2007) compared Australian and Chinese leaders, identifying universal and similar values of addressing followers' interests and being diplomatic, innovative, inspirational, persuasive and a team-player. They also report a uniquely Australian preference for egalitarianism and a consultative approach, providing low power-distance leadership.

Muenjohn (2009) reviewed the effectiveness of Australian expatriates in managing Thai employees, finding that Australian leaders had to display respect or "Keang Jai" (politeness) more than in Australia since Thai subordinates view their managers as father figures and expect support in personal problems.

Leadership skills that Australian nurses required were not just limited to staffing and finance issues but were predominately the "human" skills such as communication, conflict resolution, collaboration, participative decision-making, constructive feedback, facilitates professional development, sensitivity to the needs of staff and a provider of support and motivation (Roche et al., 2015). This list again mirrors the mateship and high egalitarian relationship that is present in Australian workplaces.

These skills were also reflected in a study on academic leadership in Australian universities, where it was identified that a broad range of skills were required in both “hard” and “soft” formats. These hard skills include knowledge about finance, technical skills and academic policy whilst the “soft” skills focused on communication, emotional intelligence and mentoring (Bradley et al., 2017).

A recent study into the characteristics of ethical leadership displayed by Australian leaders, ascertained that integrity, courage and trustworthiness were viewed as important traits (Crews, 2015). These character traits were based in three key themes being value alignment, governance and relationship-centeredness. Crews (2015) identified that a leader’s ethics is connected to their identity and this influences the leader’s behaviour toward positive follower outcomes such as job satisfaction and organisational commitment. Central to this form of leadership is the ability to set clear expectations, modelling of desired behaviours and a system of accountability that holds all people responsible as being positive traits (Crews, 2015).

The research completed by Crews (2015), also reinforces the findings from Ashkansay and Falkus in that ethical leaders demonstrated humility and were not focussed on themselves rather having the awareness that they needed to give back to the community and “serve the public interest”. They forgo their self-interest to invest their time in nurturing and developing their team knowing full well that they could lose them into the future. This is aligned with more recent research in the leadership field on the authenticity of the leader, the relationship and accountability to the wider community (Ashkanasy & Falkus, 1998; Crews, 2015; Davis, 2014).

### **2.7.1 Leadership in regional Australia**

There has been limited research into the requirements for leadership in regional Australia. The research that has been identified focusses on regional cultural aspects rather than the skills required of regional leaders. This is despite a long history of Federal and State Governments identifying a need to



increase regional leadership capability, particularly in order to improve economic sustainability (Clifford, 2010; Davies, 2007).

Leadership in regional Australia may have to incorporate certain social and cultural characteristics not found in urban contexts. Pini (2003) suggests regional areas may be more adversarial, emphasising hierarchy and tradition, for example still identifying women's roles as more often domestic or family-orientated. It appears regional organisations have fewer females, young people, indigenous Australians or people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in senior positions than their metropolitan counterparts (Pero & Smith, 2008).

A second difference is that a leader may have to work with more confined social networks, where conflicts and pressures are more concentrated and daily life influences the work environment more than in the city (Davies, 2007). This is supported in research conducted by Wildy, Clarke, Styles, and Beycioglu (2010) which reviewed the requirements to prepare principals in leadership roles for rural and remote schools in regional WA. The major findings were that maintaining life / work balance, managing budgets, applying system policies, balancing these with local imperatives and acquiring the resources to achieve these imperatives were problematic. In describing the concerns on achieving a life / work balance, principals reported that they felt that coping with the public visibility in the day to day work and feeling confident as the leader were the stimulus of concern (Wildy et al., 2010). Despite the concerns on maintaining life / work balance, principals overall seemed to consider themselves well prepared for understanding the culture of the community and developing relationships within the community (Wildy et al., 2010).

In more recent research by Harley, Metcalf, and Irwin (2014) the adversarial element of leadership was found to be necessary but alongside the need for cooperation and political awareness in some community interactions,

suggesting that different leadership styles need to be considered in solving complex community problems. The research also found that public sector leaders took on the role of community leader outside of the organisation in order to effectively engage stakeholders and mobilise social capital (Harley et al., 2014).

Regional leaders today face many developmental choices as their communities engage with new markets, growing research on agricultural, economic and social issues, and greater local self-determination than previously seen in these once remote locations (Allen et al., 1997; Collard, 2007; Davies, 2007; Karpin, 1995; McKenzie, 2001). Regional Australia is now largely export-dependent and therefore susceptible to world market pressures as global communication and information systems have broken-down many physical barriers (Allen et al., 1997; Karpin, 1995; McKenzie, 2001).

### **2.7.2 Summary of Australian leadership**

Effective Australian leaders often aim to be “one of the boys” to increase subordinates’ performance and achievement, and to be inspirational but not so charismatic that they stand out in the crowd or become a “tall poppy”. However, while these generalisations have some credibility, they also assume a fixed, mono-cultural viewpoint, overlooking the increasing diversity of values in a globalizing world (Collard, 2007; Davies, 2007). Further, within “Australian” culture there are an increasing number of subcultures with different values (Collard, 2007; Davies, 2007). Generalisations about either leadership universals or Australian leadership styles should therefore acknowledge that the leader’s challenge is to identify the *specific* knowledge and capabilities of his or her team, for example to recognise when to be more or less dominant (Collard, 2007; Davies, 2007).

Regional leaders in both public and private sectors are consequently facing new demands outside their past experiences, and in many instances, are not well equipped to address them (Allen et al., 1997; Davies, 2007; Karpin, 1995;

McKenzie, 2001). This further highlights the need for a regional leadership development program to be implemented, to assist in improving leadership capability in the regions.

## **LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS, THEORY AND CONSIDERATIONS**

### **2.8 Availability of leadership development programs**

There are a multitude of leadership development programs (LDP's) on the market. Some of these are offered as part of formal qualifications in the Vocational Education and Training (VET) Sector or through universities and private training providers. There are also a range of less formal programs offered by private providers, many of which offer special customisation to suit different audiences.

A review of some of the providers that are currently available within WA that operate outside of the formal VET and university sector are summarised below:

#### **2.8.1 Australian Institute of Management Western Australia**

The Australian Institute of Management (AIM) offers a variety of programs and other initiatives across the year relevant to leaders, with a focus on helping participants build lasting professional networks. The institute can customise professional development to suit different audiences and locations.

#### **2.8.2 Australian Rural Leadership Foundation**

The Australian Rural Leadership Foundation (ARLF) program is a comprehensive offering for regional leaders with six modules held over approximately eighteen months, including an overseas study tour. The foundation also offers an eight day residential program for emerging leaders

with a focus on capability building in business and the community. The foundation customises programs for particular sectors (one of the programs is discussed in greater detail in section 2.10.2)

### **2.8.3 Copland Leadership Program**

The Copland program is available through the Committee for Economic Development of Australia and is delivered in partnership with Curtin University. Participants from different sectors undertake seven monthly modules which include case studies, group discussions and information about theory and practice.

### **2.8.4 Institute of Public Administration Western Australia**

The Institute of Public Administration Australia (IPAA) WA holds events, training and development across the year to relevant leaders. The institute partners with TLC Solutions to offer a leadership development program with workshops, action learning and coaching available. Customised programs are available.

### **2.8.5 Jawun Indigenous Corporate Partnership**

Jawun Indigenous Corporate Partnership is a not for profit organisation which links the corporate sector to Aboriginal Communities to develop programs for positive change. Public Sector employees share their experience and expertise through secondments in Aboriginal organisations. The program supports the Public Sector Commissions Aboriginal Employment Strategy by providing a unique development opportunity for public sector managers to live and work in a local Aboriginal Community to build capacity and share skills.

### **2.8.6 Leadership Western Australia**

Leadership WA facilitates programs aimed at developing leadership skills and fostering an understanding of regional issues. Programs enabled leaders in the Gascoyne, Mid-west and Pilbara to collaborate and enhance their skills

without leaving their region. The program incorporates targeted projects which deliver meaningful outcomes in the community.

### **2.8.7 Suitability of available leadership development programs**

Although there are a range of customisable LDPs available on the market, due to the associated costs with contextualising the program to meet the needs of the public sector, these programs are largely not suitable. Even if the option was taken to not contextualise the LDP, the costs would still be prohibitive for large scale implementation. These costs include high enrolment fees, time away from the workplace, travel expenses and replacement staffing costs (MacPhail, Young, & Ibrahim, 2015). The access to the course is also problematic due to tight workforce resources and the smaller offices found in the regions which limit the number of staff that can attend (MacPhail et al., 2015).

The main issue with the LDP's that are regional specific is the limited availability of places on the courses thus rendering the course unsuitable for wider participation from across the sector. The combination of these factors results in outsourcing a LDP being a cost prohibitive and unsuitable exercise for the public sector. The ideal solution for the public sector is to develop an in-house program at a lower cost, where access caters for smaller regional offices and considers the requirement to maintain frontline service delivery so that the selected staff can attend (MacPhail et al., 2015).

## **2.9 Research on leadership development programs**

Rural LDPs have been prevalent in Australia since the 1990's having been implemented to counter the growing concerns around social and economic problems stimulated by population drifts in regional communities (Madsen & O'Mullan, 2014; Madsen, O'Mullan, & Keen-Dyer, 2014). Despite the debates on LDPs within the literature, there has been little evaluation on the programs themselves (Madsen & O'Mullan, 2014).

The research that has been conducted on LDPs has focused on course curriculum and content, delivery methods, cost-effectiveness and graduate performance, including participants' perceptions of their leadership improvement (Alexander, 2010; Allen et al., 1997; McKenzie, 2001; Nabben, 2011; Pero & Smith, 2008). This previous research also highlights the importance of creating development programs and other means of gaining high-level leadership experience that translate leadership theory into the practical issues facing the regional managers' communities (Alexander, 2010; Allen et al., 1997; Davies, 2007; McKenzie, 2001; Nabben, 2011).

Day, Fleenor, Atwater, Sturm, and McKee (2014) conducted a review of the literature presented over the past twenty-five years of LDPs, finding that both intrapersonal and interpersonal skills featured in the content. Intrapersonal skills included, experience and learning (job roles and positions held), skills (creative problem solving, strategic, business and cognitive) personality (patterns that differ between junior and senior leaders) and self-development (activities that promote development e.g. human resources). In contrast, interpersonal skills included social mechanisms (positive learning environments, innovation and quality relationships) and Authentic leadership (leaders and followers gain self-awareness and establish open, transparent and trusting relationships).

In reviewing the course content of regional Australian programs, transactional and transformational leadership is emphasised. Transactional LDP content focuses on building individual skills of participants, in the belief that the development of the leader will provide organisational solutions (Madsen & O'Mullan, 2014). In contrast, transformational LDP content aims to enrich the social networks, cohesiveness and civic activity within the regional community (Madsen & O'Mullan, 2014). Individual self-development (the participant understanding their own strengths and weaknesses) and emotional awareness (greater understanding of self) along with building social capital (a greater

understanding of how others behave which reinforces trust) also feature strongly within the transformational LDPs (Madsen & O'Mullan, 2014).

In these courses, transactional skills tended to focus on issues such as problem solving, conflict management and grant writing skills (Madsen et al., 2014). In comparison, transformational skills take a community based approach and developed skills that contributed toward building community networks and creating cohesion within the community (Madsen et al., 2014).

A significant issue with LDPs is in the evaluation of both the program itself and of the participants that have attended courses (Day et al., 2014; Madsen et al., 2014). Focussing on job performance and performance change over time is not the most appropriate approach to understanding the development of a leader (Day et al., 2014). This combined with a lack of time and resources and that few adult learning models cater for learner evaluation, results in self-reported questionnaires being the primary quantitative tool of choice (Madsen et al., 2014). This results in validity and reliability issues as participants are left to rate themselves which may result in over-estimation of strengths and underestimation of weaknesses (Day et al., 2014), which is consistent with the more nebulous components of adult learning evaluation approaches (Madsen et al., 2014).

It is also recognised that leadership development occurs as a process which incorporates a number of complexities, firstly, the process starts at a young age and is partly influenced by parental modelling. Secondly, it involves the application of skills that have been shaped by factors such as relationships with others and the individual's personality. Finally, the development practices implemented should consider how to develop the individual, thus practices should be tailored carefully to the individual's developmental needs (Day et al., 2014). These are factors that need to be considered when developing a LDP.

### **2.9.1 Considerations in developing a leadership program**

Leadership development programs assume many different options, with coaching becoming a popular form of development for more senior leaders, whilst other options include retreats or academies for professional development. Leadership development methodology often takes a mixed approach to enable a richer, more challenging and holistic experience (Davis, 2014; Day et al., 2014; Dubrin et al., 2006). Day et al. (2014, p. 64) also notes “Leader development focuses on developing individual leaders whereas developing leadership focuses on a process of development that inherently involves multiple individuals”, with the latter being the focus of most LDPs.

Traditional development of leaders occurs in a number of ways with formal training and experiential learning or a mix of both being prominent methods (Bradley et al., 2017).

The potential components of a leadership development program may include:

- Short workshops;
- Long formalised training sessions;
- Self-paced online learning modules;
- 360<sup>0</sup> feed-back,
- Coaching;
- Mentoring;
- Web-based support;
- Experiential learning through collaborative projects, and;
- Action learning activities (Davis, 2014).

Critically, (Davies, 2007) found leaders trained in standard business cultures were not able to operate effectively in the overlapping social networks and power constructs of a regional community. Success was highly dependent upon being able to access resources and influence the actions of the wider community through social networks (Davies, 2007). The value of practical



experience in this was further highlighted by Wang (2004) in observing that leadership development stimulated by direct experience is more powerful than conceptual knowledge gained through classroom teaching.

The value of practical experience is also reflected in the University of Wollongong's leadership "*Program for Preparing Early Leaders*" (PROPEL) where two distinct attributes are concentrated upon. The first is those aspects that can be easily taught in a course based format and reflect the "hard" skills of leadership such as finance, policy, rules and managing risks. The second related to the "soft" skills such as personal values, emotional intelligence and resilience which are targeted through the following six interrelated components:

- Mentoring;
- Networking;
- Big-picture;
- Leadership skills;
- Active leadership, and;
- Reflective leadership (Bradley et al., 2017).

In developing a leadership program, there is no exhaustive list of principles to adopt, however an organisation should establish an approach in which to be able to bench mark against (Davis, 2014). However, developing individuals involves more than selecting a particular theory and training people in the behaviours of that theory (Day et al., 2014). Leadership development is complex, because human development involves a complex set of processes, as such the focus needs to be directed toward development as much as leadership (Day et al., 2014).

In tailoring leadership development programs, a blended approach which incorporates formal programs for the development of the "hard" skills, experiential learning to develop the "soft" skills and a mechanism provided

through some form of peer support in the form of coaching or mentoring are desirable (Bradley et al., 2017; Brown & Bourke, 2017; Collard, 2007; Davies, 2007; Davis, 2014; Dubrin et al., 2006). The inclusion of coaching and mentoring enable a leader development focus to be incorporated into the program (Day et al., 2014).

### **2.9.2 Participants and the skills to be developed**

The characteristics desirable in regional leaders are relevant to those currently presented in the content of LDPs generally. However, the selection of participants needs to be considered with those shortlisted to attend having the general attributes of being committed to the course, energetic and able to build commitment in staff and the wider community (Allen et al., 1997).

Parry (1998) notes that training can provide the basics, but a leader must want to develop, having a desire and need from within, and hence leadership development is largely a self-development exercise. Dippenaar and Schaap (2017) observe that leadership grows out of self-awareness, insight and reflection, qualities gained through experiential learning and coaching rather than conventional competency-based training. Drew, Ehrich, and Hansford (2008, p. 15) stated that *“learning to lead is a lifetime responsibility”* as such learning is a gradual and ongoing process which needs to be nurtured and can be further developed through exposure to different types of experiences (Bradley et al., 2017).

Combining both regional and global outlooks, Allen et al. (1997) proposes that regional leaders need to be:

- Worldly, with knowledge of national and international affairs;
- Visionary, with a strong sense of purpose and goal achievement;
- Courageous, with the ability to challenge the status quo;
- Communicators, with the ability to share their vision and build teams, and;

- Role models, with high levels of ethics and values.

Similarly, Plowman (2004) found leaders in agricultural associations were more likely:

- To have had higher levels of education than other members;
- Travelled overseas more often;
- Were more often larger producers;
- Were more extroverted and open to experience;
- Displayed a higher need for achievement and power, and;
- Had a lower fear of rejection.

Allen et al. (1997) reviewed the Australian Regional Leadership Foundation (ARLF) program as a noteworthy example of a regional LDP. The ARLF is a not-for-profit organisation providing scholarships for people from regional areas to undertake leadership development. A maximum of thirty-five participants are selected each year. Participants attend a 59-day course over 17 months, including a regional exchange visit to a host community where participants are exposed to issues facing regional organisations such as dealing with indigenous communities, lack of infrastructure, poor local economic conditions and environmental issues.

At the time of the review sixty-one participants had graduated and sixty-three were currently engaged in the course. The review identified that skills and abilities that regional leaders needed were:

- Create, articulate and drive a vision;
- Build effective teams;
- Sense the changing currents in organisations and the environments in which they operate;
- Identify and analyses the strategic issues affecting the future of rural and regional Australia;

- Influence governments, industry and the community, and participate in shaping national policy;
- Conceptualize and communicate effectively;
- Lead change and resolve conflict;
- Instill confidence in those around them that together they can achieve the results;
- Influence others through the media;
- Negotiate, lobby and represent;
- Strategic planning, and;
- Reflection and listening (Allen et al., 1997).

McKenzie (2001) evaluated several regional leadership programs in terms of their development of the individual and contribution to community leadership and social, economic or environmental viability. These programs were designed to increase participants' theoretical knowledge and skills, to develop their networks and to provide experience in collaborating on community development projects. She found the successful leaders were recognised and celebrated for bringing others, particularly less-recognised leaders, together over long distances to achieve results (McKenzie, 2001).

In McKenzie's study, the most important skills identified by participants were conflict resolution, facilitation of meetings, public speaking or media presentation, and negotiation skills. A survey assessing participants' needs twelve months after completing the program showed conflict resolution and facilitation skills were still considered the most needed, but time management and stress management skills had also emerged as important.

A significant finding in McKenzie's study was that eleven of the fifty-eight graduates moved away from their regional location during the program, seven to Perth, due to them expanding their horizons and networks. This unintended consequence highlights the need for strategies, particularly within any regional LDP, to retain regional leaders. For example, a follow-up program can ensure

continued reinforcement and development of the skills learned while revitalizing participants and helping to retain the investment in their skills within the community (McKenzie, 2001).

### **2.9.3 Summary of leadership development programs**

Despite regional LDPs being prevalent since the 1990's in Australia, the research has concentrated on course curriculum and content, delivery methods, cost-effectiveness and graduate performance, including participants' perceptions of their leadership improvement (Alexander, 2010; Allen et al., 1997; Davies, 2007; McKenzie, 2001; Nabben, 2011; Pero & Smith, 2008).

The research identified that previous LDPs have focussed on a transactional, transformational or a mixed approach in respect to the content of the program. The remainder of the research highlights some regional specific Australian leadership characteristics, suggests principles underlying the development of regional LDPs and presents some lessons from implemented programs. These provide useful background for the present study, although so far, no research has focused on issues specific to the retention of regional public sector leaders and their staff or how the introduction of a specific regional leadership development program may impact on retention in regional or remote areas.

### **2.10 Conclusion: Leadership as a retention strategy for regional Public Sector officers**

The public sector workforce is attempting to address continuous and current changes in their internal and external environment, such as the aging workforce and other demographic changes, culture shifts and globalization in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is posited that this will require innovative and strategic HRM practices to meet the challenges of the resulting "war for talent" (Demers, 2002; Earle, 2003; Goldsmith et al., 1999; Nieto, 2008).

This review highlighted retention as a key human resource management strategy for times of labour shortage which are experienced in regional WA. Retention may remain an important strategy for regional offices beyond the current economic situation, since public sector jobs have lower wages and other qualities that reduce their attractiveness (Aijala, 2001).

While developing mid-level staff may not be the panacea to all that is at issue in regional areas in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century context, it has been shown that developing regional staff as leaders can help retain both the managers involved and their subordinates. Research shows that career advancement, skills development and the opportunity for varied and challenging work can motivate staff to remain in an organization (Roche et al., 2015; Samad et al., 2015).

Leadership development programs can help meet these goals and therefore provide a useful retention strategy. However, research on retention has so far not considered leadership development, concentrating more on predicting turnover from employee attitudes and demographics or causes of organizational dissatisfaction. Improved leadership skills could address some of the personal and organizational issues identified in this literature.

There is also little research on the specific skills needed by leaders in regional areas. Some studies have identified general qualities expected of Australian leaders such as egalitarianism and a consultative approach, which are expected to be important in regional areas. Qualities more specifically associated with regional leadership in the literature include knowledge of indigenous culture and a multicultural outlook; the ability to develop social networks and work with local communities; and skills for dealing with a lack of infrastructure, the stresses caused by poor economic conditions (in some areas) and environmental issues.

Only a few studies have examined programs for developing the knowledge and skills needed for regional leadership. These tend to focus on experiential

more than formal learning, and aim to improve participants by increasing self-awareness, widening social networks, discovering local resources and becoming influential in the local community.

This research project sought to build on this framework by gathering the views of regional WAPS managers on the specific challenges they face in retaining staff, the skills needed for leadership in regional offices, and how these can be developed to retain talented staff, especially in remote areas. The findings contribute to the literature on retention in the public service context, and on the specific issues faced by organisational leaders in regional areas of Western Australia

## **CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Research design**

The literature review has identified a lack of research on leadership development as a retention strategy, and particularly on its relevance to the public sector and regional environments. This study is therefore exploratory in nature, aiming to identify regional leadership development practices that could improve retention in this context. It answers the research questions using qualitative and quantitative analysis methods. First, semi-structured interviews with public sector managers holding SES or aspirant leader positions in regional WA were used to gain a broad overview of the issues as seen by senior staff in regional offices. To gain a more representative view of the issues faced by staff and leaders a survey of regional employees was then undertaken. As an exploratory study, the results were expected to lead to more specific research questions for future research while providing evidence for WAPS leaders on the reasons impacting retention amongst regional employees and the offer of leadership development in reducing this.

The interviews were designed to gain a broad overview of the issues facing regional agencies and more particularly to gather public sector managers holding SES or aspirant leader views on the issues of retention and leadership development in their region. The interview questions covered four broad areas: (i) the differences between leadership in regional and metropolitan areas, (ii) the skills required of a regional leader, (iii) the potential content of a regional LDP, and (iv) if leadership development would improve retention in the regions. The findings were expected to help formulate the online survey questions.

The online survey aimed to gather employee's perspectives on these issues. The online survey was delivered to a wide range of regional WAPS employees. The questions addressed the main research questions two to four by asking



respondents for their views on the leadership skills needed by regional employees, what skills they would like to develop themselves, what sorts of leadership development activities would suit their context and what factors might cause them to leave their current job or region. The latter included discrimination, work-life balance, wellbeing, intrinsic motivation, job satisfaction, work pressure, job design, recognition, advancement opportunities and intention to leave.

The mixed method approach to this research enables triangulation of the data. Triangulation is a term that derives from topographical studies by surveyors or sailors and refers to a trigonometric survey method which identifies the distance between fixed points (Cataldi, 2016; Neuman, 2006). In the social sciences, this form of research methodology utilises different approaches to analyse the same phenomenon, from several angles, with the aim to increase the reliability of the research results (Cataldi, 2016). Researchers have identified three specific uses for the triangulation research approach:

- Helps with systematizing a theory;
- Supports interpretation of the results of a study, and;
- Information enrichment (Cataldi, 2016).

The combination of a semi-structured interview with an online survey, increases the volume of data available and assists with finding new opportunities and stimuli within the area of research thus providing information enrichment (Cataldi, 2016). In mixing the qualitative and quantitative styles within this research in a sequential manner, the strengths of each methodology complement each other providing overlap and a fuller more comprehensive data set (Neuman, 2006; Sandelowski, 2000).

It was expected that SES or aspirant leaders, referred to as participants from this point onwards, and employees referred to as respondents from this point onwards, might have different perceptions on critical issues. Participants were

expected to be more aware of the department strategic goals, policies and operational requirements, the leadership skills of people below them and the agency's image amongst local community leaders (i.e. managers are the primary face of the agency and behaviours are reflective of the communities' expectations). Respondents would be more attuned to the operational functioning and work climate issues in the local office and its daily interactions with individuals in the local community.

By 'triangulating' these 'top-down' and 'bottom up' viewpoints the researcher hoped to gain a broad picture of the regional WAPS environment focused on the nature of leadership and the possible role of leadership development in retaining staff. An important element of this study involves comparing and synthesising the two perspectives in Chapter 6.

## **3.2 Participants**

### **3.2.1 Regional manager interviews**

Participants were public sector managers holding SES or aspirant leader roles from regional locations from agencies operating in Health, Education, Child Protection, Agriculture and Food, Regional Training Institutes and Regional Development Commissions. These are not the only agencies with regional operations, but are chosen for convenience of access through the researcher's personal networks and regional travel activities. Their workforce comprises a sizeable percentage (85%) of all regional WAPS employees. Interviews were conducted at nine regional centres (see 3.5 below).

### **3.2.2 Employee online survey**

The survey gathered the views of employees across all relevant WAPS agencies in regional centres, smaller country towns and remote locations. The survey was distributed to department human resource managers with a request to forward it to all their regional employees. It is highly desirable that

the agencies have a representation in the sample proportional to their presence in the regions.

### **3.3 Instruments**

#### **3.3.1 Regional manager interviews**

Interviewing is an important way for a researcher to gain the impressions, thoughts and feelings from a person about a subject. Structured and semi-structured interviews are formalised and consist of a series of questions designed to elicit a response to specific questions, with the information provided being able to be compared and later contrasted (Flick, 2011; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). The researcher utilised a semi-structured interview for the purposes of this study.

Although semi-structured interviews are traditionally used at the end of research to ensure there is support of the researcher's perception on how things are, the researcher in this study used the interviews at the commencement of the research journey. The purpose was to firstly test the researcher's perception and then to assist in obtaining information to shape the online survey (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). The semi-structured format also allowed interviewees to feel comfortable in exploring issues in detail. The interviewer could clarify responses and probe for further details such as personal stories, examples or comparisons with other regions, departments or regional offices. This is supported by Flick (2011) who found that the success of a semi-structured interview is the degree that the interviewer probes the discussion to gain a greater depth to the question, beyond the initial generally superficial answer.

The primary benefit of semi-structured interviews is that participants answer the same bank of questions, which provides a complete set of data for each person, thus increasing the comparability of responses. The pre-established questions also reduce the effects of interviewer bias, whilst the semi-structured

format permits the interviewer to evaluate and explore trends across the interviews (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). As interviews take a qualitative approach to research, the semi structured nature assists the researcher to collect, analyse and interpret data simultaneously, going back and forth between these steps as required (Neuman, 2006).

The regional manager interviews were semi-structured, using a mix of closed and open-ended questions (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003) that left room for exploring issues at a deeper level (Appendix 1). The questions were designed to incorporate the distinct types of interview questions. This included knowledge based questions which seek to explore factual information (Flick, 2011; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003), behaviour or experience questions seeking to elicit the interviewees past experiences in working in the regions (Flick, 2011; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003), and opinion or value based questions (Flick, 2011; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003) which sought to ascertain what the interviewee thought about topics and issues on leadership and leadership development. Although not specifically incorporated into the bank of questions, demographic based questions and feelings based questions also presented themselves during the interview due to its semi-structured nature (Flick, 2011; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003).

The questions focussed on: (i) the differences between public sector management in regional and metropolitan offices (e.g. What factors do you think make Public sector management and leadership in your region different to the metropolitan setting?); (ii) the leadership skills required by managers in regional offices (e.g. What management and leadership capabilities are required by managers in your region?); (iii) whether leadership development would help develop those skills (e.g. Could these capabilities be part of a leadership development program in your region?); (iv) problems of retention in their region (e.g. Are there any issues in your region that cause employees to leave?) and; (v) the value of leadership development in reducing turnover (e.g. Would a leadership development program reduce turnover in your region?).

### **3.3.2 Online survey**

The online survey was constructed with Qualtrics. It began by seeking demographic information, then asked respondents about the leadership skills needed in their regional office by selecting fifteen possible skills. It asked what leadership skills they would like to develop and what sorts of leadership development would work best. Respondents were then asked to rate a list of nineteen possible factors that might cause them to leave their current job, and asked what other sectors or industries they would go to if they were to leave. Finally, they were asked to rate nine work-related and non-work factors that might cause them to leave their region.

The questions were refined after analysing the regional manager interviews, to ensure they covered aspects of leadership and retention considered relevant by the regional managers. The demographic based questions remained unchanged, however significant clarification occurred to the initially proposed questions. Examples of these type of changes follow.

The leadership skills section was refined to improve the fifteen options available. This occurred in two ways, firstly responses utilised the language and terminology provided by the interviewed participants. The second resulted in some of the options changing focus by increasing clarity such as “Selecting and developing people” became three options one titled “Recruiting people”, another “Developing staff” and the third “Selecting the right people for projects” which were all themes that stemmed from the interviews. Another example was “Getting information, making sense of it and problem solving” which became two options, “Problem solving” and “Making sense of reports or accounts”. The proposed question on improving skills competency section was completely reviewed and was altered to match the listed skills in the previous leadership skills section (i.e. the same list of fifteen options were available and all previous options were replaced).

A new section developing your leadership skills was included which provided a range of options on how an employee would like to engage with a leadership development program and included delivery options (e.g. job shadowing of a regional manager) as well as how a program might be scheduled in the regions (e.g. a five day workshop in Perth).

Without losing the purpose or integrity of the data collection, the retention section of the survey was also reduced in size to accommodate the addition of this new developing leadership section. For example, a question which sought to identify the features which related to the satisfaction rate of working in the public sector was incorporated into another question and some options were completely removed from the available list of options (e.g. exposure to trauma and stress level including irregular working loads).

A pilot study was then conducted using five employees known to the researcher, and further changes were made. These changes were mainly structural, focusing on the design and layout within Qualtrics. On the recommendation of the pilot responses, additional industry options were provided in the question 23 “If you were to leave where would you look for new employment?”. For example, not looking for further employment (maternity, retirement) and Self-employment. The final version of the survey is shown in Appendix 2.

The questions about leadership skills needed in regional leaders and development activities asked respondents to rank a list of fifteen items. To make this process manageable with so many choices, items were dragged into boxes indicating high and medium importance (i.e. those remaining were then categorised as having low importance). Other questions used a sliding scale (0 to 100) to assess respondents’ interest in developing certain leadership skills or their satisfaction with aspects of the job, workplace and local community context. For these an “Other” category was provided, allowing free-text qualitative responses. The demographic section, and a later question

about where respondents would go if they left their current position, used check boxes.

### **3.4 Ethical issues**

Approval was obtained from the Edith Cowan University School of Business and Law Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) before beginning the interviews and distributing the online survey. The study was also conducted with the approval of senior executives in the WA Country Health Service, Department of Agriculture and Food WA and by the CEO's of three Regional Development Commissions who distributed the survey to employees and regional contacts. The data from both studies were anonymous and confidential. All ethical procedures of HREC were followed.

### **3.5 The sample and the sampling process**

Western Australia has been divided into nine operational regions based on their economic and administration location within the state through an Act of Parliament being the *Regional Development Commissions Act 1993*. The nine regions are Kimberley, Pilbara, Gascoyne, Mid-West, Wheatbelt, Peel, Kalgoorlie-Esperance, South West and Great Southern. Each region is unique in size, population, primary industry and economic opportunities, capitalising on its uniqueness through tourism.

Depending upon the location of the region, there is the potential to have three types of location classifications, a regional office, a smaller town or a remote townsite. Each region has a regional office which is the most highly populated centre in the region. The department regional office is situated in the regional centre and supplies services in the regional centre as well as managing and coordinating services across the region. A regional office may have smaller

offices and remote locations reporting to it. As a generalisation, a regional office would comprise of no more than seven to fifteen staff.

Areas which are outside these regional centres are smaller towns and are usually serviced from the regional office having no or very limited WAPS presence in the town (e.g. a pop up office for a half to full day a week). Smaller towns are usually serviced by appointment direct with the clients or stakeholders which require regional employees to travel by vehicle to deliver these services (e.g. Police may attend the town every second week for a half day to conduct licensing requirements).

A remote townsite is situated a great distance from the regional centre and is serviced by public servants who reside in the remote location. Depending on the region, these remote locations may also service smaller towns that are in the geographical vicinity like the operations of a regional office. A remote centre is smaller than the regional centre and may have two to seven staff depending on the location and the area that is serviced. Regardless of the location that a regional employee resides or works in, they spend a considerable amount of time travelling in the region to provide services and engage with stakeholders (e.g. A health nurse may travel from the remote location to a smaller community to administer vaccinations at the local school).

The sample includes SES, aspirant leaders and their employees in public sector agencies in these various regional locations. The scope of the research was limited to regional employees to gain their views on the leadership skills required to perform leadership positions in the regions, as such metropolitan employees were excluded. The scope of the research was not limited to any one agency type or regional location type. The researcher enabled a cross section of public sector agencies in each location to participate to avoid any influence from cultural aspects that may result from the one organisation or area.



The online survey excluded the Peel region since staff now have close contact with Perth following their recent connection to the urban railway system. The research does not include metropolitan leaders as this is outside the scope of this research project, however the manager from the Public Sector Commission's (PSC) Leadership Development Branch was interviewed to ascertain current practices and prospects for future regional leadership development. The data collected from this participant was integrated with other data and given the same weighting as other data.

The researcher was in contact with potential SES and aspirant leader interviewees (Chief Executive Officers, Regional Directors and Senior Executive Service employees) and other agency contacts useful in disseminating the online survey because of regular work trips to regional locations. Ethical practices were adhered to during these initial contacts with the purpose being to elicit interest and potential availability to participate in the research. After gaining approval for this study, these people were contacted to explain the nature of the study and request their participation in an interview. If this participation was not forthcoming, the researcher asked them for other potential participants with an appropriate length of service in that region, and personal experiences of, or recent participation in, a leadership program run by the department, the PSC or an external provider.

A total of nine interviews were conducted either in face to face meetings or via teleconference meetings across regions with a diverse range of agency representation. The interviews were conducted between April 2015 and September 2015 to meet with the availability of the interviewees around annual leave and other commitments. Further details are provided in Chapter 4.

The online survey aimed to target employees, those who are aspirant leaders and those holding SES positions from regional centres, smaller town offices and remote locations in all nine regions, a population of approximately 30,000 employees. However, the researcher's initial arrangements for distributing the

online survey fell through due to changes in personnel and policy in the PSC. The public sector does not have a common communication platform since each agency is a separate legal entity, making broad-scale access hard without a complex process involving support from the PSC. The researcher therefore had to use contacts in two agencies known to have a large regional workforce to distribute the survey. A total of 156 participants were involved in the final survey. The survey opened in June 2016 and closed in November 2016.

### **3.6 Data collection methods**

#### **3.6.1 Regional manager interviews**

Prior to the interviews, potential participants were contacted to arrange a suitable time and place. The researcher began by presenting the information sheet, explaining the study and answering questions about it, and obtaining informed consent.

One of the weaknesses to be considered when using semi-structured interviews is that the interviewee may not understand their role as a participant. In this aspect, the participant could view the interview as a therapy session, a test, a bureaucratic exercise or some form of trap (Neuman, 2006). To assist in putting the interviewee at ease and to increase the rapport between the interviewee and researcher, the questions were provided after verbal consent of participation was obtained, a few days in advance of the interview. This provided the interviewee with time before the interview to understand their role, ask questions and provide considered responses. This in turn increased the clarity of responses and efficiency of the interview.

A further consideration is that these types of interviews can provide limited flexibility which can restrict the natural flow of conversation. This may limit the relevance of answers to the questions as the interviewee may not feel comfortable in relating their personal stories or feelings (Fraenkel & Wallen,

2003). To address this issue, the researcher started the interview with non-threatening questions that focused on day to day matters such as recent periods of leave, breaking news events, the weather in the region in comparison to Perth and the type of projects that the interviewee was currently working on. These initial questions provided time for the interviewee and interviewer to prepare for the interview questions and establish a rapport where an atmosphere of trust could be developed (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003; Neuman, 2006).

The interviews took one to one and a half hours and were either conducted in participants' offices or via the WAPS teleconferencing system. As well as asking the questions in Appendix 1, the researcher was alert for opportunities to explore deeper or broader issues, clarify details, probe short answers and reflect back on previous ones or the interview as a whole. The researcher was able to use this methodology to collect, reflect, analyse and interpret data simultaneously, going back and forth between these steps during the interview as required (Neuman, 2006).

At the end of the interview participants were asked if they had any concluding thoughts, and then were debriefed and thanked for their participation. Additional follow up contact was not required with the interviewees in respect to their responses. The interviewees were contacted again at the time of the survey distribution to enlist their assistance with the distribution of the survey to regional employees.

All interviews were voice recorded with participants' permission, and the researcher made notes during and where appropriate soon after the interview. The recordings were later transcribed for analysis, omitting minor elements not relevant to the research question. The notes focused on the researcher's observations about regional leadership and retention and were referred to during the data analysis phase of the research. Combined with the recording and transcriptions, this gave a rich sense of the themes and offered details that

helped in the data analysis stage (e.g. the notes enabled the researcher to focus on key words in each interview question and review the transcripts to seek out the context of how the word was used).

### **3.6.2 Online survey**

Human resource managers (HRM) in regional offices of the Department of Agriculture and Food (DAFWA) and the WA Health Country Service (WACHS) were asked to email the survey link to all their employees in regional centres, smaller towns and remote locations, approximately 10,500 employees. Another 200 employees from three Regional Development Commissions and other regional offices where the researcher had contacts were also sent the survey. While it is not possible to ensure all employees opened the email the researcher was able to verify that the HRMs did distribute the survey.

## **3.7 Reliability and validity**

Reliability and validity are central issues in research measurement. Validity describes the 'truthfulness' of research findings, and is a function of the research methods and sampling procedure (Neuman, 2006). Reliability refers to the consistency of scores or answers provided by an instrument from one administration to the next where similar conditions occur (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003; Neuman, 2006). In qualitative research validity is more about authenticity to participant's views and experiences than a single objective version of the truth about social phenomena: a fair, honest and balanced account of participant's views. Validity reflects the fit between researcher's understandings, participant's ideas and statements about the social environment, and actual events (Neuman, 2006). Reliability refers to the dependability of the data, and is considered less important in qualitative than quantitative research (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003; Guba & Lincoln, 1981, 1989).

In this study validity is increased by triangulating the interview findings with the survey data (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003; Neuman, 2006) and by the researcher's

extensive professional knowledge of the regional WAPS work environment. The reliability and validity of the interviews was increased by checking key themes with participants during interviews, by using notes and transcripts to underpin the thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Validity of the survey was improved by using the interview findings to inform the online survey design, and by pilot testing the survey (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003; Neuman, 2006). Having the researcher's supervisors check both analyses processes and outcomes further improves the reliability and validity.

The exploratory nature of this study precluded standard checks of validity used in quantitative research, but the online survey can also be said to have face validity as it was checked by the researcher and supervisors for fit with known aspects of the research domain and piloted before being distributed to the main population. Its reliability was not assessed with quantitative statistics as it is not designed as an instrument for statistical hypotheses testing.

### **3.8 Data analysis**

The interview transcriptions were first used to tabulate responses to closed questions and open questions with simple answers. For open questions with more complex responses, thematic analysis was used. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying and analysing the patterns found in the social distribution of perspectives on an issue and reporting those within a study (Flick, 2011). As an inductive, exploratory study, themes should emerge from the data, especially from the interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The thematic approach discourages the account of themes "emerging" or being discovered as this is a passive approach to this form of analysis. The "emergence" of a theme disregards the active role the researcher plays in selecting the important and interesting themes. As such, an important stage in the thematic process is for the researcher to acknowledge the framework in which they recognised these themes as conscious decisions and not

something that simply emerged (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The approach taken in this research adopted the six step guide developed by Braun and Clarke (2006):

1. Familiarise yourself with the data;
2. Generate initial codes;
3. Search for themes;
4. Review themes;
5. Define and name themes, and;
6. Produce the report.

Further detail on how each of these steps were followed is given next.

### **3.8.1 Data familiarisation**

As part of the interview process, the researcher took short hand notes of the interview in the event that the voice recording was of inferior quality, the technology failed, or the conversation was not captured due to competing technology (i.e. teleconferencing facilities interfering with the recording). After completing the interview, the researcher listened to the recording and reviewed the overall comments against the notes provided. This process was conducted to assess the quality of the voice recording and make any alterations to the teleconference system for future interviews.

In reviewing each interview in this context, the researcher was able to obtain a sense of the probing questions that might be introduced to improve the interview data, particularly on matters that maybe specific to a regional area as opposed to those applicable to all regions.

The researcher personally completed the transcription of the audio data into written format for each interview, so that thematic analysis could commence. The software program “Dragon NaturallySpeaking 12.0” was utilised to initially transfer the spoken word into written format. The researcher transcribed the

written word in greater detail, capturing the verbal account by including punctuation as appropriate along with other non-verbal cues. This included adding annotation, coughs, laughs and other utterances. The completed transcripts were then reviewed against the original audio recording by a third party to check for accuracy with agreed corrections being made as required.

As the interview process was dispersed across several months, part of the reliability process was to refamiliarise with the previous interview guide and hand-written notes taken during the interviews. Braun and Clarke (2006), recommend that the researcher is fully immersed in the data so that they can become familiar with the breadth and depth of the content before initial coding begins. The use of technology enabled the spoken word to be converted to paper, however, by the researcher completing each transcription, the interpretation of the annotation, data and non-spoken cues were able to be understood. This was the initial phase of the researcher taking an active role in the identification of themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

### **3.8.2 Generating initial codes**

The researcher made a conscious decision to conduct manual coding over the use of computer software. This decision in part was due to the familiarity that the researcher already had with the transcripts and the small number of transcripts to review (n = 9).

To commence initial coding, the researcher used the printed transcripts for each interviewee. The transcripts were then separated by question with the responses from each participant collated into one printed document i.e. the answers provided for question one from all the participants was collated into one large answer for that question. The researcher read each response for the question as one whole and highlighted key words along the way such as *“differences in leadership”* or *“capabilities required”*. This process was supported with notes about the text in the margins. For example, a *“miscellaneous HR”* category was created to cover items that linked to human

resource characteristics and a “*other?*” category was created for matters that appeared to form no basis of an overall higher-level grouping.

To avoid future confusion with the notes and the coding made on the printed document, the researcher made electronic copies of the original transcripts. The transcripts were then manipulated to reflect the higher-level groupings identified on the printed document. The documents were saved on a hard drive with a naming convention that matched the appropriate coding i.e. “*Isolation*”. This process enabled the responses that had multiple codes to be included in all coding conventions, without fear of being lost in only one.

This process of condensing all responses into codes for each question via a paper based system and then recreating those codes into independent electronic documents was replicated for all of the data sets. This process of coding or “code file” creation enabled the data to be organised into meaningful groups. The inclusion of a miscellaneous and the ‘other’ code enabled all data to be included and provided an overall map of the various relationships (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

### **3.8.3 Searching for, reviewing and naming themes**

Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 89) states that the searching phase “refocuses the analysis at the broader level of themes, rather than codes, involves sorting the different codes into potential themes, and collating all the relevant coded data extracts within the identified themes”.

The researcher utilised the same approach identified in the coding stage to search for themes and sub themes i.e. within each electronic “code file” themes were identified, copied and moved within the electronic document to link themes and sub-themes.

In addressing the challenge of being able to later identify the various data an identification system was developed by the researcher. The identification



system allocated a letter to identify the various participants i.e. A to I and a number was allocated to identify the question where the data was obtained i.e. 1 to 7. Thus, a classification of C3 resulted in the original data being in the transcript of participant 3 and in question 3. This enabled the researcher to move the data across themes and sub themes without losing its original origin if it became necessary to relocate the individual data. In this regard, the researcher was also able to identify the complex web and crossover of the sub themes.

This also enabled the commencement of the fourth and fifth stages of the process to occur whereby these themes could be reviewed against each other, defined and named accordingly. For example, the sub theme of *“breadth of job role”* was seen as a potential difference between regional leaders and metropolitan leaders. This resulted in regional leaders demonstrating having to know more generalist information from HR policy through to finance rules than would be expected of metropolitan or other leaders. In reviewing the other sub themes in the data, this was seen as both an opportunity, as it increased their breadth of knowledge making them more attractive for senior roles, but also as a disadvantage for the regional leader as it resulted in the degradation of their specialised professional knowledge which is also held in high regard for future leadership positions.

As part of the review process, some themes and sub-themes were disregarded as they provided limited relationship to each other or the research questions at hand. For example, one theme was that there was an abundance of opportunity to perform many job roles if you were enthusiastic. Through this process the researcher was able to create a data set of themes that accurately mapped the participants meaning in the context of the research topics (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For example, the size, location, structure and resource availability were all able to be themed into the one theme.

#### **3.8.4 Producing the report**

This last phase can occur when a full set of themes have been determined and final analysis can occur (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher approached this phase by printing the various code files which had the themes and sub themes embedded within them and using the classification system A to I and 1 to 7. This enabled the original data to be extracted to produce the overall draft of Chapter 4. Once the draft chapter was prepared, the classification system could be used to provide direct quotes in support of the relevant theme. To distinguish between the comments provided by the various participants within Chapter 4, the researcher assigned false names to each participant. The finalised results of this report are provided in Chapter 4.

#### **3.9 Online survey**

The Qualtrics survey data was analysed with SPSS version 23. Means, standard deviations, medians and frequencies were used to summarise responses to closed questions. Responses to the two questions asking respondents to sort items into most important, next most important and least important categories were analysed using separate tables for each category and these were then compared (refer Appendix 3). Responses to the open-ended (free-text) questions were grouped into themes using similar methodology as the interviews, and summarised with frequency tables. The results of the quantitative analysis are provided in Chapter 5.

## **CHAPTER 4 INTERVIEW FINDINGS**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents findings from the interviews with nine public sector managers holding SES or aspirant leader roles in regional offices. Thematic analysis of answers to the open-ended questions yielded five primary themes, each with additional sub-themes addressing each of the research questions. Participants primarily considered leadership in the broad requirements of managerial staff during the interviews.

The sections below cover the specific areas of the interviews which included: differences between leadership roles in regional and metropolitan offices; the leadership skills required in regional locations; developing a leadership development program; the issues causing employees to leave the regions and; the potential impact of a leadership development program (LDP) on retention.

Before turning to this, some demographic details of participants will provide context. To distinguish between the comments provided by the various participants within this chapter, the researcher has assigned false names to each participant. A total of nine interviews were conducted either in face to face meetings or via teleconference meetings, with the participants located at Broome, Port Hedland, Carnarvon, Geraldton, Northam, Kalgoorlie, Bunbury and Albany. The participants represented the diversity of the public sector with one participant from each of the following agencies:

- Department of Child Protection;
- Allied Health Services;
- WA Country Health;
- Department of Education, and;

- A Regional Training Institute, now referred to as a Tertiary and Further Education (TAFE) institute.

Three of the nine Regional Development Commissions were also represented with the final participant being the PSC leadership program manager. This interview was conducted in Perth. Each of the above departments perform a variety of roles within the community and range in size depending upon the region and the services that are required.

The participants were senior members of the public service holding a range of positions, with two being Chief Executive Officers, one a Chief Finance Officer, two Regional Directors, one Director of Human Resources, two General Managers and a Principal Policy Officer. Two-thirds of the participants were female with most aged between the mid-forties to the mid-fifties, one aged in the mid-thirties and one aged in the late fifties. Except for the Principal Policy Officer from the PSC (who had not worked regionally), all participants had worked in regional locations for over three years and the majority (except two) had worked in more than two regions. The two exceptions had worked in one other region immediately prior to transferring to their current location. The participants all resided in a regional centre as their positions were attached to the regional office.

The participants have all participated in some form of LDP. These programs had been offered through a range of providers with over half participating in some form of agency sponsored program. One participant had participated in an ANZSOG program, one in the Executive Master of Public Administration program and two were participants of the Public Sector Commission leadership programs. Almost all have attended some form of private development program or conference either through their professional membership or through other offerings which has contributed to their leadership capability. These programs have been delivered predominately in

the Perth metropolitan area or interstate in a capital city, thus requiring the participant to travel from the region.

## **4.2 Differences between regional and metropolitan leadership roles**

Participants reported many substantial differences between the leadership roles in regional and metropolitan areas. Some of these differences more directly concern leadership itself while others are about the context in which leaders operate. They advised that regional leaders needed skills to deal with the:

- Greater breadth and depth of roles, and greater autonomy (8 participants);
- Broader range of business skills required (7);
- Greater community involvement (7);
- Smaller or less resourced offices (6);
- Lack of professional development opportunities (6), and;
- More difficulties in recruiting and developing staff (5).

These themes are now discussed individually. In the sections below, they are listed in order of frequency, with two exceptions where a less common 'headline' theme frames the others.

### **4.2.1 Greater breadth and depth of job roles and more autonomy**

The most striking difference between metropolitan and regional leadership roles was in the participant's view of the breadth and depth of job requirements. Regional leaders saw their role as more generalist, a "*jack of all trades*". Most thought they faced a far broader range of tasks than metropolitan leaders, often working across the whole business area of the agency not just in their own unit. They spent more time in procuring resources and services, for

example maintaining building infrastructure where city leaders would have a separate team to manage these functions, as Sansa explained:

“The structures are much flatter here in the regions, you have to do more for example, I know of quite a few people who are currently working in procurement or in the infrastructure areas, they were nurses so they have a huge amount of knowledge about the frontline services of health, but due to their exposure to these areas, they have now gained management positions in these areas of infrastructure, capital works and a range of other things, so the regions have given them the opportunity to expand into those roles”.

Participants also discussed the need to work with more diverse internal and external stakeholders, including staff in the regional office and Perth head office, counterparts in other regions, central oversight agencies such as the Public Sector Commission, Department of Finance and Office of the Ombudsman, as well as a range of suppliers, clients and other external parties needed to run the office. This, in their view made regional leaders more visible to their employees and other agency staff, as Jon advised:

“you have a greater ability to drive and influence delivery of services not only in your own agency but interagency and across agencies, so there is greater opportunity for collaboration..... I know colleagues in similar positions and you run into them all the time at meetings..... it is a good opportunity”

This diversity of stakeholder engagement was exacerbated by staff shortages. An extreme example is a manager who was operating across three positions for a period of six weeks whilst the substantive position holders were on periods of leave and other training. These roles were her substantive role of Chief Finance Officer and the job below that being the accounts officer, during this time she was also acting Chief Executive Officer, as Margaery explained:

"I'm the CFO and now I'm currently the acting regional manager, which means I'm doing projects but I still have to keep an eye on the corporate services stuff, as I will have to go back there and do it all, I'm still doing ..... role whilst they are away, and I still have to do the simple things like answer the phone along with everything else."

Regional leaders were also considered to have more decision-making autonomy than metropolitan leaders. Jamie commented:

"..... [we] have almost become independent institutions there is a lack of contact with senior management now and this is across the whole region..... You have all the finances and key performance indicators..... You really are the employer and you are responsible for those matters of performance management etc.....".

While this autonomy made things difficult at times, it also gave managers greater opportunity to develop employees through acting in higher level roles. In contrast, the participants saw metropolitan leader roles as being more compartmentalised, lacking in complexity and diversity of tasks and less nimble or competent in non-routine situations. Margaery commented:

"You need to consider a range of factors and the overall picture, such as OHS or security. For example, we have a security system for the building, if it goes off at night, the Regional Manager has to come in check the building and turn it off, you need to consider the OHS more so than the property. This just wouldn't happen in the metro area as they probably have security."

#### **4.2.2 A Broader range of business skills**

Participants considered themselves more aware of the business objectives and processes at all levels of the agency than their metropolitan counterparts. In their view, this makes them more efficient and effective in meeting the local community's requirements. Talisa commented:

"Staff don't specialise in one area they have to be often across a number of areas. For example, we only have three human resource based staff in which each have a more diverse role than their metro office counterparts, which could have half a dozen working, each in one particular role".

Participants felt the diversity of the agency's work helped staff overcome barriers and create entrepreneurial and innovative solutions. As Talisa put it:

"I'm stunned by the level of innovation that can occur and exists in the regional and remote areas because you have to be constantly looking at ways in which you can deliver the service".

Participants also found the regional environment was subject to quicker change, particularly in remote locations, but their ability to understand the whole of their organisation helped them deal with this. They saw themselves as more capable of managing operational tasks, working outside the box, managing with limited resources and managing upwards occurred more than metropolitan leaders, Brienne stated:

"People develop a particular skill of managing upwards, at a pretty low level, but managing upwards and influencing key decision makers with solutions".

The participants felt that their isolation from other senior staff, governments and media scrutiny led to greater decision-making authority, and flexibility in managing physical and human resources, Talisa stated:

"You are able to be much more flexible and practical in the management of matters as you are not as widely observed, such as not operating under the nose of the Minister, less ability to get into the media, so, we can be innovative and flexible."



The flatter structures in regional offices also were seen to contribute to this, Talisa commented:

"You don't have more autonomy per se - you still need to operate within the framework of legislation - but I think the execution of things is much easier as the structure is flatter, and you don't need a large hierarchy to have things approved".

Regional leaders also valued the greater opportunity to network with other government, non-profit and community leaders in regional settings, Sansa commented:

"If you get several agencies working hand in hand to deliver a particular service, the better the outcomes are in the region".

The ability to communicate with a diverse range of people from CEOs to Aboriginal people and those from different cultures was consequently considered an important skill. Interestingly, the high staff turnover was also seen as having a positive side as new staff brought fresh perspectives, Brienne mentioned:

"New people coming in also provide fresh new ideas which stimulates a renewal and rethinking, this is stronger in the country".

#### **4.2.3 Greater community involvement**

The third major difference lay in being a respected "family member" amongst the local community, a major benefit according to five of the nine participants. However, this had both positive and negative consequences, while it was helping to advance agency goals it was also challenging to leader's individuality and intruded into their personal life.

To some extent, the sense of community countered leader's isolation by providing a supportive network with a 'family feel' and the reward of making a real and tangible contribution to the community, Cersei stated:

"Regional is much more about a family feel, it is more than just the job, it is the allure of people doing things in the community".

On the down side, four participants saw the local culture as less refined, which flowed over into the workplace with behaviours that would be unacceptable in metropolitan offices being tolerated, Theon commented:

"The culture is a bit more rough and ready and this is considered acceptable behaviour and occurs as well in the workplace".

The participants themselves tended to have a high standing in the community, making them more visible than their metropolitan counterparts which gave them access to higher-level business, community and government networks. A drawback of this was the high level of expectation about both their personal behaviour and the agency's role in the community, Catelyn commented:

"As you are in the community 24/7 you have to be a good role model all of the time, whereas you can be quite anonymous in the city".

Six participants commented on the negative effect of this public visibility on their work-life balance, Jon stated:

"Your own life is clearly visible in the regions, with separation between work and life being less clear cut..... You have less anonymity in the country, the smaller the town the less you have".

Supported by Talisa:

"Well there is the culture, it is how you work with people, you have to be strong as a lot of judgements are made about you as an individual".

A related problem raised by the participants involved socialising outside the workplace, since social and work relationships were necessarily intermixed in small communities, Jamie stated:

"In the metro you leave home, go to work and head home again, without being tied up on the local issues, you don't tend to live near your school, so you are in a different environment socially".

Supported by Sansa:

"Relationships within the community are very different, it is close, you know everyone, and everyone knows you".

This also meant leaders also had more exposure to the personal lives of staff. This could be positive, but became stressful when things were not going well, Talisa stated:

"I think that there is also a stronger sense of loyalty ... as you know them [staff], their family, where they live, and you have a greater level of rapport with them due to that – it is both a pro and con, but you don't have that level of intimacy in the metro".

"The community members [are] also your staff, you see them outside of work, at functions, so it is good to have a strong working relationship with them".

Supported by Jamie:

"You really are the employer and you're responsible for those matters of performance management etc., so it becomes difficult and can add to that feeling of isolation".

Interestingly, one participant felt that managing such role-conflicts was good for developing future leadership capability, Brienne commented:

"We see that the conflict is a good thing as you are involved in lots of stuff, it is how you manage those interactions with your work that is the critical thing, the transparency on decisions ...".

Close involvement with the local community also brought the participants challenges and even dangers when community members were affected by natural disasters, deaths, personal threats and similar events, Jon commented:

"The impact on you when things go wrong such as natural disasters or murders, or suicides have ripple effects through the community..... and..... on the minor end, it could be that you are interrogated over an issue or decision you have made by a member of the community at the extreme end it is that it could be dangerous to you or your family because at child protection we have cause to remove children sometimes, this is the same for police and corrections officers".

Supported by Cersei:

"In the regions, your job doesn't really stop, you are known and maybe approached or judged, your direct reports might also be your neighbours etc.".

There was also the expectation that leaders would socialise outside work hours with visitors from their agency or other areas of government and politics. For example, they might feel obliged to give visitors a tour of the local attractions or host a dinner, something a metropolitan leader would not necessarily experience.

#### **4.2.4 Smaller offices**

The next theme relates to the smaller size of regional offices or their correspondingly limited resources, points each raised by three participants. This meant their organisational structure was flatter, missing layers found in metropolitan offices and often have only one or two people at a level. For example, there might be a Level 9, a Level 7, a couple of Level 5s and a few Level 2s. Many offices had less than twelve people.

This structure led to a lack of career pathways in regional offices, including acting opportunities. Staff often had to move to another agency or region, and moving to Perth was difficult since the selection process involved competitive assessment and a greater recruitment pool. These difficulties added to the feeling of isolation and entrapment, a personal issue not necessarily experienced by metropolitan leaders.

Whilst smaller offices provided these challenges for leaders, participants reported that it also provided improved opportunities for empowering employees and to develop leadership capability internally for aspiring leaders who had an opportunity to act in much higher levels than their metropolitan counterparts.

Interestingly, participants reported that the lack of resources in regional offices had led them to develop skills for "making do", becoming more innovative, pragmatic and engaged with the local community than their metropolitan counterparts. They often had greater inter-agency communication and

support, and saw this as enabling them to potentially be more financially efficient as Talisa noted:

"We also don't have the scale that metro do, so you are always trying to balance the books and watch every penny. I think that all staff are more aware of this aspect".

Regional leaders had to also overcome barriers to communication with Perth head office and other government oversight agencies, particularly in relation to policy changes. In this regard, it was not necessarily the impact of the policy change itself that caused the issue rather, the time that it took to be advised of the policy and supporting material. Often this information trickled down slowly through the bureaucratic channels within the agency. An illustrative example of this might be with a Treasury Instruction which is forwarded from Treasury to the relevant department CEO. This instruction is then assessed internally by the finance area reviewing the impacts and required changes to implement the policy change. A notification on the impacts and new administrative processes to be adopted is drafted by the finance branch and then forwarded to the communications branch for distribution to the wider agency. This could take a few days to occur from the initial instruction being issued. Catelyn stated, *"I often got a hint that something had changed but I would have to waste time investigating what it actually was"*.

The issue of being a smaller office also meant that limited communication was not restricted to policy changes but also impacted operational aspects. It was acknowledged by the participants that in the metropolitan area, leaders had the ability to have informal conversations which enabled non-routine issues to be quickly rectified or led to minor alterations in the operational process. As Cersei noted:

"Metro have access to more resources, people, documents - it is all at the fingertips e.g. corridor meetings provide much more opportunity for informal

communication. The regions are more formal (contact with the metro area is by appointment), which may take days or weeks to achieve the same result (going back and forth)".

#### **4.2.5 Lack of professional development opportunities**

Another common theme, identified by six of the nine participants, was the lack of opportunities for professional development, such as those that are offered in the metropolitan areas including: breakfast seminars; 'lunch and learn' sessions; updates from oversight agencies such as the PSC, Disability Services Commission or Worksafe, and networking events. Attending these would involve substantial costs for air travel and accommodation not faced by metropolitan leaders, as well as the indirect costs of absence from the office, difficulty finding acting replacements, and the extra work awaiting their return. Experienced mentors were also hard to find due to the high turnover and the small pool of staff.

Two comments exemplify this strong sense of isolation among regional leaders, Jamie stated:

"There is a sense of isolation as you feel that you are flying by yourself. There is a lack of collegiate network that you can rely on and this has changed from a decade ago where people in regions got together".

Supported by Talisa:

"You end up with that feeling of isolation, particularly when it comes to professional-based networks that you might get in the city or a larger regional organisation."

While participant's access to metropolitan events was increasingly facilitated by communications technology this did not readily support social interaction, Theon advised:

“Professional development opportunities are improving with the use of technology (Skype or video conferencing etc.) but attending morning breakfast seminars provides the added benefit of that networking and collegial support”.

Isolation in the participants’ opinion reduced manager’s awareness of policy and practice developments, requiring them to constantly research and check written documents to manage the office and limiting their career development options. Three participants felt metropolitan managers looked down on regional manager’s skill levels, as explained by Margaery:

“Yeah it is an interesting one, I mean it is quite difficult, I mean I’ve never thought that when I have applied for a job in Perth, now I wouldn’t think that I wasn’t competitive, and I would make sure that I would read the selection criteria..... but it is the sheer volume of people that apply..... I never thought of the fact that they can do it better because you are not up to scratch but..... it is difficult because there is also the issue of if I got the job and you liked me then they would have to pay the cost of bringing me back to Perth so would they do that if they have someone just as capable, you know right there in the next suburb.”

#### **4.2.6 Difficulties in recruiting or developing staff**

The final theme was that regional leaders had more difficulty than metropolitan leaders in recruiting the right staff for vacancies, a major disadvantage mentioned by five of the nine managers. As the pool of candidates with relevant expertise was smaller, leaders had to accept less skilled or experienced candidates. Margaery noted that *"in Perth, they would receive 5 times the volume of applicants we would for the same type of role in the current climate"*. The situation was even worse in more remote areas. They also advised that they had limited scope to attract recruits from outside their region since many regions are not seen as attractive places to work.



As a result, new recruits generally lacked necessary skills and required additional development or job experience to bring them to an acceptable level, and it was hard to find professional development options to help them. Human resource expertise and advice was also mentioned to be limited, and these leaders felt they often lacked important information on HR processes such as recruitment and day-to-day management issues. Catelyst commented "*we have to work things out for ourselves as a result, we don't have a range of specialist staff like metro do*".

This problem was more acute for specialist skilled staff with, for example, those in health, education or child protection roles, Sansa:

"You don't have the internal support (highly experienced workers) or the management support (externally) so there is no back up, you need to rely on your networks in other regions to gain the assistance required".

Four participants also saw a lower level of skills amongst *specialists* recruited into regional positions, particularly in finance and human resource management. Specialist staff in regional areas were often new to the public sector, immigrants or recent graduates with limited work experience, and would not normally get the same position in Perth.

#### **4.2.7 Summary**

Managers reported a wide range of issues unique to regional WAPS offices, notably the greater breadth and depth of roles than their metropolitan counterparts experienced but also their greater interaction with and dependence on the local community. Staffing and resource shortages were also common. Communication back to Perth as the central office and slow receipt of information which was issued from oversight agencies also impacted upon regional offices. On the other hand, participants thought regional employees had greater opportunity to 'make a difference' in the local community, and had more egalitarian workplaces. These themes were echoed

in responses to subsequent questions about the skills needed by regional leaders, the prospects for developing them, and the effects on retention.

### **4.3 Skills required by regional leaders**

This section of the interview turned participant's attention to the skills required to operate in a regional location and the possible nature of leadership in their region. Seven themes summarise the participant's views of the skills and capabilities needed in regional leadership roles, they are listed in order of frequency, with one exception where a less common 'headline' theme frames the others:

- Core leadership skills and management based competencies (5 participants);
- Networking skills (9);
- Greater breadth of skills and knowledge (6);
- Flexibility and resilience during change (6);
- Creative thinking (5);
- Managing limited resources (5), and;
- Being a community leader (4).

#### **4.3.1 Core management and leadership skills**

Interestingly, when asked what skills a regional leader would need, five participants initially responded with "the same capabilities as a metropolitan leader". However, when rephrased as "what do metropolitan leaders need to succeed in the regional setting?" participants tended to begin "Regional leaders still need the same capabilities as metro leaders but....", this led them to identifying the capabilities of metropolitan and regional leaders plus the additional regional specific issues below (4.3.2 to 4.3.7).

In the ensuing discussion, participants identified several capabilities that were relevant to both metropolitan and regional WAPS leaders and echo the Public Sector Commission Leadership Capability profile:

- Shaping the strategic direction of the organisation;
- Achieving results;
- Building productive relationships;
- Exemplifying personal integrity and self-awareness, and;
- Communicating and influencing effectively (Wauchope, 2016a).

Shaping the strategic direction can be described as the development of a strategic direction which is aligned with the whole of government agenda. One that harnessed relevant information and identified the opportunities to improve practices and respond to risks (Wauchope, 2016a).

Achieving results included consideration of alternative approaches on the deployment of resources and included incorporating technology, professional expertise and development of a strong culture of achievement that was compliant with regulatory requirements (Wauchope, 2016a). It involves putting strategy into action, the identification of required projects and driving the operational imperatives toward increased efficiency. A key factor is establishing measures of accountability and enacting good governance

Building productive relationships included both internal and external stakeholders. The focus being firstly toward the Minister's Office and across public sector agencies before engaging with other diverse stakeholders such as not for profit organisations (Wauchope, 2016a). Participants highlighted that it was important to look for shared agendas and bring these people together to encourage input and facilitate cooperation. Building productive relationships also extended to coaching staff, encouraging a continuous learning environment and empowering employees to achieve organisational goals.

Exemplifying personal integrity and self-awareness focussed on role modelling professionalism, living the public sector values and acting in accordance with the Code of Conduct (Wauchope, 2016a). It included making tough decisions and taking responsibility for mistakes whilst learning from them. It also extended to identifying opportunities for self-development and being open to extending one's skills and experience.

Finally, communicating and influencing, (Wauchope, 2016a) incorporated the themes such as listening carefully to the audience, presenting messages concisely and in a clear manner and presenting a clear rationale.

Having the above shared skills in mind, the view that emerged from the participants suggested that a regional leader could be transferred into a metropolitan role without skills development, but a metropolitan leader could not take up a regional role without it. These managers tended to focus on the broader range of management skills and technical competencies needed by regional managers, than metropolitan managers, given the broader range of tasks they need to perform, as noted above. These included aspects of occupational health and safety, budgeting and funding of deliverables, project management, IT, managing people, managing risk, understanding governance requirements, performance management, change management and staff development. Besides broadening their management competencies, these regional participants suggested that metropolitan leaders would need to learn about the specific environmental, cultural and social challenges faced by regional leaders. This indicates that better outbound training from the metropolitan area is required for those seeking regional leadership positions.

Throughout the interview, participants provided responses and key words that related to the variety of theories examined in Chapter two, however participants did not specifically identify a particular leadership theory by name or link these words to a theory. Participants identified skills or competencies covered in mainstream trait theory, which can be seen over this theory's long

history, as cited in Northouse (2016), Stogdill's 1974 survey identified ten characteristics and traits that were positively associated with leadership. The leadership skills identified by the participants (e.g. initiative, insight, self-confidence, sociability, influence and responsibility) affirm these "personal characteristics" in leadership and are further highlighted throughout the various sections of this chapter (4.2.2 and 4.2.3 as examples).

Participants also identified that leadership was dependent on the situation presented, highlighting aspects of situational or contingency leadership, such as dealing with the impacts of natural disasters (4.3.3) through to engaging with a variety of community stakeholders by being a community leader (4.3.7). As the focus, here is on qualities unique to regional leadership, rather than the identification or support of a leadership theory, these are discussed only where they were identified as such. Although, participants did not identify any leadership theory by name or specify leadership theories against the examples they discussed, it was evident that regional leaders felt that they needed to adapt their approach and change direction according to the situation and the set of circumstances that they were facing. This was more apparent when participants started to identify the differences between metropolitan and regional leadership requirements as indicated below.

#### **4.3.2 Networking skills**

Not surprisingly, networking was considered essential to regional leadership by all participants. Leaders were seen as public relations and media sources, responsible for their agency's local image. Being recognised by almost everyone in the community required them to cultivate personal relations and engage widely with local issues. Good working relationships with senior staff in Perth and other regions, and other stakeholders in, for example, industry or non-profit organisations were also vital, Talisa noted:

“Business outcomes are not done in isolation they are always done through collaborative relationships, joint contributions and joint outcomes [though] it takes a while to build those relations”

Regional leaders advised they needed to network with people of diverse backgrounds and professions, from unemployed persons to mining company staff, business owners and professionals. Good interpersonal skills were therefore more important in their opinions than for their metropolitan counterparts, and required a more strategic approach to networking. For example, links with one organisation could be used to leverage individuals in another, allowing leaders to address local issues faster than metropolitan leaders. This strong preference for joint collaboration appears to be unique to regional leadership, where it is common practice.

Several participants related the importance of networks to a community perception of government leaders as ‘naturally’ persons of high standing, able to “open doors”. However, this could be quickly eroded if the leader was not perceived to be genuinely committed to the community, Margaery noted:

“A person was in the job but would drive back to Perth every time they had days off. Although it is old fashioned, I think you have to live and work in the community not just visit and work in the community”.

Regional leaders therefore were seen to need to manage relationships with a long-term view and deep immersion in the community. This brought certain challenges, Catelyn stated:

“You need to be able to develop relationships as you are immersed in those and need them to develop the right strategy”.

“So, it is that forced self-discipline to be able to separate their personal view from the professional view, because you know you might be sort of having

some form of debate with somebody today, but tomorrow you are going to need them”.

On the other hand, participants reported missing contact with other senior leaders and officials outside the region including the Director-General and Minister, more so than their metropolitan counterparts. Those with high career development ambitions felt required to eventually return to Perth to join such networks.

#### **4.3.3 Greater breadth of knowledge and skills**

The previous theme (4.2.1) reported the observation that regional leadership roles have greater breadth and depth than metropolitan ones. When asked about the competencies needed by regional leaders, participants highlighted broad expertise in both their own field (education, health etc.) and government operations generally. Equally, leaders needed good understanding of the nuances of their region’s geography and socio-cultural identity, including its Aboriginal culture(s), Margaery commented:

“Knowledge of the area is important as there is nothing worse than someone who has been here for 3 minutes telling everyone what they should do”.

To develop relevant knowledge and skills, it was considered that regional leaders needed to be self-directed learners, proactively seeking a better understanding of their role and its links to rest of the agency as well as the social and organisational fabric of the region. Two observations on this point where, Jamie commented:

“Versatility with people and the ability to wear so many hats, you don’t have to be perfect at everything, but you need to be good across the board to make it work and function”.

Supported by Margaery:

“You have to be really versatile and enjoy the variety, being able to liaise with Perth as they might need one thing, but we have ten of those [same] level of importance issues occurring, all from different areas, all with a different focus.”

An illustrated example of this last comment might be where the leader is dealing with several competing demands that are occurring in the local community, such as a sudden death from a car accident, where the families involved become hostile toward each other and the wider community starts to form views about the matter. In the process of addressing the variety of issues in this scenario, liaising across local government agencies providing the support required, Perth head office is seeking information and updates on the circumstances of the situation due to increasing pressure from media outlets. Other examples include complex scenarios such as preparing for and dealing with natural disasters such as cyclones or flooding.

Regional leaders therefore were seen to need to be appropriate time managers, balancing their time across very diverse tasks and prioritising skills to meet operational needs. They need to be good at conceptualising problems and brainstorming innovative solutions while maintaining public service standards of safety, quality, risk and governance requirements.

#### **4.3.4 Flexibility and resilience**

The fourth regional leadership capability is flexibility and resilience in facing the challenges described in the previous section. In the opinion provided by the participants it was clear that the complexities of dealing with community members particularly required greater resilience, adaptability and change than a metropolitan leader would typically encounter. Participants also saw the need for having a “thick skin” and the capacity to show professionalism under trying conditions.



A particular challenge to flexibility for managers coming from the city that was seen as important was that regional community members often have cultural values and a style of thinking that city dwellers might see as 'old fashioned', especially in remote and underdeveloped areas. For example, local institutions and managers might exhibit a more male and Anglo-Saxon culture, behind the social trends evident in Perth, Margaery noted:

"You have to be ready to be exposed to radical old thinking, a strange type of people as that is the type of people that are in the regions or attracted to the regions".

Supported by Talisa:

"You need to be strong and resilient because you work in the regions and it is still a bit of a man's world, you need to serve your time before they open up to you".

Supported by Sansa:

"You are judged fairly harshly when you first start, and they [the local community leaders] are pretty influential in the community - you have to earn your stripes".

In these circumstances, it is a combination of being the "incomer" and not being a local and part of the "old guard" which has proven their leadership capability to the wider community over many years and across a variety of situations. In the regions, the WAPS leader must contend with the fallout of any decisions not only in the workplace but also in the wider community, for a much longer period than a metropolitan leader who is largely anonymous after an event. These fallout issues, failings or shortcomings are not forgotten and often resurface at the next situation the regional leader faces, something that a metropolitan leader is largely immune to. A high level of resilience is required

by the regional leader to face the next challenge with a fresh outlook, putting these concerns aside.

Flexibility was also seen to be required to address staffing shortages and to manage the competing interests of local stakeholders. As well, social isolation and the greater mixing of work and social life affected employee's mental wellbeing, requiring a degree of resilience and a more flexible approach to work-life balance than city staff needed. Regional staff lacked access to basic health services taken for granted in the city, having to travel to a regional centre for dental and medical services, professional development and even to finding trade people or hardware to service their house. This required managers to take a more flexible approach to leave and staffing, while simultaneously maintaining work performance with limited resources.

#### **4.3.5 Creative thinking**

Over half the participants identified creative thinking as a critical competence for regional leaders, since traditional public service approaches were often ineffective or expensive in the narrower structures, smaller workforces and limited budgets of regional areas. Leaders need to "think outside the box" when assessing problems, seeking practically convenient solutions to complex, often unanticipated problems. This story is a typical example, Margaery commented:

"Thinking of solutions that are out of the box and making decisions quickly. For example, we had a board meeting ... and they were meant to fly back ... but the plane couldn't fly because we had a storm. We could have got them a rental car, but then you have the cost of hire, having to collect the car later which would have a person out of the office for 8 hours to return it etc. Or have them stay the extra day until it passes etc."

#### **4.3.6 Managing limited resources**

Allied to flexibility and creativity is the ability to manage with limited resources, whether human, financial or physical. Regional leaders need a special ability

to juggle and organise resources. One participant went beyond merely managing existing resources, suggesting a need to grow resources, for example, an agency may share physical resources that are not available within the other agency such as video conferencing systems to benefit the local community. One participant gave this simple example of creative thinking to address limited resources, something that had not been thought of or actioned before, Margaery advised:

“We used to take home cars [to look after them]... and our FBT is high because of that fact, so we ended up agreeing to put up a proper fence, a really nice fence and we would go halves [with the neighbours]. ... Now we can secure our cars at night and don't have home garaging. So, it was just a case of looking at that car yard, thinking I'm really sick of this and the fighting over taking home cars, well how can I get out of this and is there another solution?”

In this instance, the solution may appear simple but required several barriers to be overcome before achieving this result. The first barrier was the problem of spending government finances to improve the infrastructure on a privately-owned and leased property. This required extensive liaison with the Department of Treasury and Building Management Services in gaining approvals to spend government money and make these alterations. Once the proposal was approved and sanctioned, the next step was to create a tender document and put the work out to tender, obtain three quotes, and make a selection on the contractor in accordance with the selection criteria as per government tendering guidelines. After a contractor was selected the leader was required to manage both the contract and project management of the construction. As can be seen this is a complex and time consuming process to install a fence and gate. The second barrier was the change in office culture whereby those who previously housed the vehicles, viewed them as a personal issued resource, now they were an agency resource which needed to be signed out from the vehicle fleet for each journey, creating conflict within the office as the new processes were implemented.

#### **4.3.7 Being a community leader**

As noted above, regional government managers are often looked up to as community leaders, not just agency leaders. Consequently, they need to understand the region's social and economic context and work with the community as a whole. Participants highlighted knowledge of community demographics, a sense of 'how things work' (often in 'rough and ready' ways), and how to deal with people from Aboriginal and other cultures. As Cersei stated, *"It is a bit about how long you have been "living on the land" before becoming local [considered in the eyes of a local]"*.

In this regard, the dedication displayed to the community and the length of time that a leader had lived in the community, played a significant part in the credibility of a regional leader and the value of their point of view being accepted, but despite this the leader may never be truly accepted as by default they were not a local born leader and would always be an outsider. The local leader who hailed from the community would always have more influence over the local community than any person coming into the community. As Talisa stated, *"..... they [the local community leaders] are pretty influential in the community - you have to earn your stripes"*.

Being a community leader meant making a conscious decision to work for the betterment of the community, not solely for personal interests: one participant saw some of his peers as more focused on promotion, pre-retirement 'downshifting' or an extended 'break' from the city. This required developing accountability, transparency and trust, maintaining authenticity in regard to politically sensitive problems and managing conflicts of interest that could reduce community member's trust. Talisa put it this way:

*"Integrity and honesty are the heart of credibility as you are judged by the community. The community is not shy in saying things on Facebook, which means you need to be self-aware, as they know what you do, where you go and what you say"*.

Summing up the notion of community leadership, critical attributes involve having an open mind, learning from experience and prioritising the region's economic or social needs. However, community leadership also required the leader to be aware of the challenges noted above, such as maintaining professionalism with staff who were also friends or social contacts, managing work-life balance, and becoming comfortable with living in the public eye.

#### **4.3.8 Summary**

Managers saw the skills needed by regional leaders comprised those leadership skills that are mutually found in metropolitan and regional leaders with some of those skills focused on the requirements unique to regional leadership, stemming from the special attributes discussed in this section such as networking, greater breadth of skills and knowledge, flexibility and resilience, creative thinking, managing limited resources and being a community leader.

Dominant public sector leadership skills include the ability to develop a strategic direction that aligns with the government's political objectives, achieving the established outcomes through the implementation of technology and specialist skills, and building third party stakeholder engagement. The combination of WAPS leadership skills needs to occur in an environment whereby a culture of strong governance and accountability exists, and employees are empowered to take responsibility for innovation and self-development.

It is perhaps not surprising that regional leaders need a greater range of skills, the ability to connect with the local community and a flexible and creative approach to job challenges, including 'doing more with less'. This leads to the concept of a regional leader having to use different leadership styles depending upon the situation or opportunity that arises. Participants were quite

adamant that regional leaders needed quite different attributes to metropolitan leaders.

#### **4.4 Developing a leadership program**

This section of the interview turned participant's attention to the value and possible nature of leadership development in their region. Five key themes emerged, concerning the overall value of leadership development, important topics for such programs, and problems they might face in attaining such development:

- Leadership development is valuable (6 participants);
- Living and working in a regional community (5);
- Ethical leadership (4);
- Networking and mentoring in the local community (4), and;
- Barriers to regional leadership development (3)

It is important to note that three areas of focus suggested in these interviews did not involve systematic consideration of the how the skills mentioned in Section 4.2 could be developed. The themes here are considered 'top of the head' initial thoughts, and in this study, are supplemented by more systematic consideration on Section 4.2 and the results of the survey in Chapter 5, in which employees were asked about the value of developing a wide range of potential leadership skills or competencies, and what skills participants themselves would like to develop.

##### **4.4.1 The value of leadership development in regional offices**

Two-thirds of participants advised that leadership development would address important needs of their regional operation, but provided hesitant or conditional answers. However, when they were asked what should be covered in such a program, many gave general comments such as "all the things previously

discussed". It appears most participants had not thought much about leadership development in their region. This perhaps, is not surprising given their lack of financial and other resources, and the government's centralised approach of limiting leadership development activities to Perth as acknowledged by Cersei:

"Currently, this operates the other way around where regional leaders attend and share experience with metro leaders to build understanding".

The six participants who responded positively suggested existing WAPS LDPs would need to be contextualised to regional needs, incorporating the capabilities discussed above and tailored to meet each region's unique needs. However, respondents did not identify any leadership needs that were unique to one region or that were required more so in another. Highlighted areas included organisational skills, exposure to different WAPS leadership styles, industry-specific (e.g., health or education) development, and programs specifically for women in regional offices, to provide an environment for women to discuss identified challenges. Participants were, however, vague about how programs might differ between regions, Theon stated: *"they are all the ingredients with slightly different emphasis on some things"*.

Three participants qualified their support for the implementation of a LDP by suggesting leadership development should involve voluntary rather than compulsory participation, or that the participants' managers should also be identifying leadership opportunities internally through exposure to situations, in addition to a more formalised approach, achieved by including these options into the personal development plans (a style of WAPS performance management). Jamie was concerned that staff were already required to take on too much and would have to free up time by giving up other duties:

"I think that they do these courses because they feel they have to, but the individual education plans etc. place a lot of demands on them ... A leadership

program would assist with our management vision if a person wants that, but, I wouldn't do it on top of their current duties".

Despite these qualifications, most participants felt a regional LDP would improve employee's leadership capability and their career options, although it appears they had little specific understanding of what should be included in such a program.

#### **4.4.2 Living and working in a regional community**

This theme addresses the challenges of living and working in a regional community noted in previous sections. Several participants highlighted key issues with dealing with the public and managing work-life balance while being highly visible in the community. Through experiential learning, perhaps involving placement in a new area, it was suggested potential leaders could learn how to balance work roles and personal interests. How to represent the organisation in and outside work hours, and how to ensure the safety of the individual leader and his or her family were topics identified by the participants for awareness-development sessions in a formal program.

Leaders also were seen by the participants as needing sensitivity in recruiting employees who were broadly aware of the local social environment. It was felt that development programs could expose new leaders to the broad range of issues facing their region. Future leaders also were seen as having a role in helping staff new to the region to learn about local issues and the problems of living and working in small or remote communities. For example, one manager suggested assessment processes for recruits seeking to move from the city, look beyond personality characteristics, skills and experience to assess candidates' ability to learn and adapt to the local culture or cultures. This was increasingly important for workers new to Australia. For those from other regions, cities or countries, the participants felt that culture shock could be a very real threat, Catelyst advised:



“A CEO moved to a really small regional town with the family and the shock to the family due to being in the public eye was very challenging. He was never warned or given any strategies to put in place for that change”.

#### **4.4.3 Networking and mentoring in the local community**

Networking and mentoring were identified by the participants as crucial elements of a LDP by two participants, as a way of giving leaders practical exposure to the genuine issues in their region. Leaders would gain fresh ideas, realistic viewpoints and collaborative networks that would endure well beyond the program. Two others similarly stressed the need for leadership development to make a difference in the local community, particularly those aspects which would stem from developing connections with community members. For example, Brienne discussed LD around women in leadership:

“I've done a few regional leadership programs and particularly around women in leadership and unless you've got them tackling real issues they just have a lovely time, there is no impact beyond the course”.

#### **4.4.4 Ethical leadership**

Ethical decision-making was considered an important focus by four managers (identified earlier in section 4.3 as a communal leadership skill for both metropolitan and regional leaders), due to the conflicts of interest regional leaders faced by also being a community leader or having staff who were also friends, and perhaps family members who were involved in the community. Identifying and managing these conflicts included dealing with gifts and benefits, using public resources for private interests, keeping in mind one's role as a public servant and the seriousness of ethical breaches. Staff often needed guidance on specific local issues.

An illustration of this might be with the local football club that is seeking government sponsorship or a grant to improve the club rooms. A WAPS employee might be able to access unreleased information as the agency they

work for is sponsoring the grant and has access to the information in the course of their employment. They may also have a working connection to the person who is assessing the grant applications or a relative who is playing in the team. The employee acting for the benefit of the community may offer to assist in the process of writing the grant application as a member of the football club. As a result, the employee now has a conflict of interest between their government role by acting in the public interest (having access to the unreleased information or the assessment criteria) against their personal interest of improving the facilities at the football club. This may negatively influence the process compromising the transparency of the process and potentially leading the employee toward an act of misconduct. It is the ethical conduct of the employee to declare their interest and ensure that the process remains unbiased.

#### **4.4.5 Barriers to regional leadership development**

The final theme involved the potential problems for regional LDPs identified by a third of participants. LDPs for staff across one or more regions involved substantial travel costs on a small budget, and bringing facilitators from Perth was also costly. These costs could be lowered by using online training to supplement face-to-face sessions. The cost in time to attend a program and replacement staff to back fill positions was also a potential barrier, especially given the shortage of staff already identified in regional offices. New technologies as discussed earlier will only ever be a partial resolution to this issue.

A more general barrier was in the communication and 'cultural' gap between regional offices and Perth offices of the agency and WAPS. Participants raised a wide range of issues including lack of consultation with regional branches, policies that overlooked unique aspects of the regional context or had unintended impacts there, and demands on staff to travel, including safety concerns, fatigue and absence from the office as well as financial costs. Such

issues present potential barriers to coordinating local LDPs with head offices or other regional offices.

#### **4.4.6 Summary**

Overall participants supported the idea of running a LDP in their region although it seemed many had not previously considered this issue in-depth, and some initial responses were given with some hesitance by the participants. Perhaps because of this, their suggestions for program content were limited to three broad issues faced in regional offices: ethics and value conflicts, networking, and the challenges of living in close proximity to work colleagues and local community members and clients. More detailed insights into these and other foci for leadership development emerged in addressing the issues of retention and attraction covered in the next two sections.

#### **4.5 Causes of turnover in regional offices**

Increasing retention was the major goal behind this study of leadership development, resulting from the researcher's work agency developing an interest in using development to retain staff by providing them with a career pathway. When managers were asked why employees left regional offices, eight themes emerged but most had little relationship to leadership. This was initially surprising, in light of the expectations behind the study. However, reasons for this emerged from subsequent questioning. First, some managers saw staffing as more of a problem of attraction, which can also be addressed by offering leadership development to newcomers. Second, the survey of regional employees in Chapter 5 appears to show senior leaders had a different view to their staff. The interpretation of the findings in this section is therefore re-examined in Chapter 6.

The themes which emerged relating to retention are listed in order of frequency, with one exception, whereby a less common theme is an interesting finding, confirming the discussions raised on attraction in Chapter 1, they were:

- Attraction is a bigger problem than retention (4 participants);
- Lack of promotion or developmental opportunities (7);
- Limited education, health, shopping and recreation opportunities (6);
- Isolation (6);
- The broad scope of regional jobs (5);
- Unrealistic expectations of regional life (4);
- Lack of jobs for family members (3), and;
- High cost of living or poor housing (3).

#### **4.5.1 Attraction is a bigger problem than retention**

Contrary to the researcher's expectation, participants were divided on whether retention was a problem within regional areas. Most acknowledged that employees were going to leave the region at some point, but half did not currently have a problem with turnover. Catelyn commented:

"We have very little turnover in our organisation due to our small staff, we have not lost a staff member in two years with some working here for 19 years".

However, these participants did have problems in attracting staff with appropriate skills and experience, receiving few applications compared to metropolitan positions and generally from low-quality applicants, for example Margaery advised:

"In Perth, they would receive 5 times the volume of applicants we would for the same type of role in the current climate"

Participants in three southern regions (Great Southern, Midwest and South West) felt they couldn't compete with northern regions, where the mining boom had led to financial incentives and other location allowances for public sector employees, for example Catelyn stated:

“Health for instance have difficulty in attracting people [here], particularly for specialist skills or professionals because there is no attraction, I’m almost convinced of that. This is in contrast to say up North where they might have the option of earning a squillion and making it worthwhile”.

Another participant experienced this problem in more remote areas, since newcomers only wanted to work in coastal tourist hubs.

Some managers found new employees from outside the region often planned to stay for only a short time, perhaps to meet corporate expectations of regional service as a pre-requisite for promotion. While they might extend their stay a little, they generally left the region, for example, Theon advised:

"Some just at the outset decide to place a certain time on being in the region say 2-5 years before moving back to Perth".

Supported by Talisa:

"Generally, people come out to the regions for a set period of time once they have done their time they are ready to move on".

As well, the participants advised that many regions were not seen as attractive places to work and live – and that this was a general attitude among people in metropolitan positions. Perhaps awareness of the difficulty of recruiting talented general staff and specialists fed into this perception of regional offices as a ‘backwater’.

#### **4.5.2 Lack of promotional or developmental opportunities**

When asked why employees left their region, seven participants pointed to a lack of promotional opportunities, also a prominent theme emerged concerning differences between regional and metropolitan offices. This was generally due to the small number of positions at middle level (4-6), the ‘stepping stones’ to

levels 7-8 leadership positions, in small offices. Even larger regional centres had this problem and was discussed like this by Brienne:

“The lack of positions within the structure and the available levels, [across the region] we have 5 or 6 SES at probably the level 8-9 in this region, then it concentrates on level 2-4 with about 400; so, you have a real triangle, you can get good horizontal experience but getting vertical experience is definitely more challenging”.

Consequently, employees had to move to gain promotion or broader experience. While they did move between regions, returning to the city was almost essential to gaining a higher-level position, for example Margaery advised:

“.. a lot leave to the metro for those career opportunities as there are very few positions above Level 7, if you want to go above that you need to move to Perth”.

Two structural changes in recent years exacerbated this problem with some senior regional positions being made redundant and government services spread over multiple regional offices being amalgamated into one large district office.

One participant saw substantial opportunities for career advancement in regional areas for those with the right skills and knowledge. However, this manager expected employees to wait for vacancies and worked in the north where turnover was higher.

Two others felt retention problems were not just resulting from the limited career advancement, but were also influenced by the lack of development opportunities which would allow them to gain another promotion, potentially in another region. The lack of development opportunities was also a factor

affecting retention due to the high costs and fewer options in regional agencies, particularly for mid-level employees.

On-the-job learning, secondment or acting at higher levels would assist in this aspect but these opportunities were only available in larger regional agencies. In the smaller offices, where these options were not available, access to develop their leadership and extend themselves professionally through a program, were considered important to improve retention. Despite the limitations of being promoted at their location, they were more likely to remain in that role until a suitable promotional position was available elsewhere. Where they don't have access to this development there was an increased likelihood that the staff member would leave the region earlier than their counterparts in larger centres.

Interestingly, one manager worked hard to give good induction and work experience to help such staff gain promotion, even though this was not in her interest. She felt that the investment in the staff member resulted in increased loyalty to the role being mutually beneficial to both parties. Catelyst suggested a points system for promotion:

"Having a points system for regions promotion aspect I think would entice people to attend the region and provide talented ambitious people into the regions. I think that is good for the sector and for the individual".

In summary, while retention was not as big a problem as expected most participants saw a lack of promotion or career advancement limiting their ability to recruit staff to more senior positions. Increased leadership development opportunities at the regional location could help with this, as some acknowledged.

#### **4.5.3 Limited education, health, shopping and recreation opportunities**

The second reason for leaving regional employment was a lack of health care, education and other local services, cited by two thirds of participants. Good quality teachers or subject options, particularly for Year 11 and 12 students, were a problem even in centres as big as Carnarvon, requiring parents to move or send children to boarding school. University study was limited to online classes.

Specialist medical services were similarly limited. While some emergencies could generally be treated in the local hospital, specialists and services such as dentists or physiotherapists were limited, often requiring travelling great distances, Margaery stated:

"We had an employee who had to take his mother to Perth and drove down Saturday and back that weekend. It was an 1800km trip because they didn't have the facilities here".

Local towns also lacked childcare facilities, retail outlets, internet access and entertainment options such as movies, the arts, theatre and restaurants, Talisa commented:

"The lack of access to the theatre, restaurants and those type of facilities, to museums .... the infrastructure [of] hospitals, shops etc. There is no Myer. I lived in Darwin and they didn't have those sorts of shops and they have 100,000 people."

#### **4.5.4 Isolation**

Six of the nine participants highlighted the problem of isolation. Being far from family connections was, as expected, a big issue, but so was lack of professional contact: a person might be the only one with that profession or work-role in a town. Employees dealing alone with complex social problems,



particularly difficult ones like alcohol abuse or child neglect, often felt a sense of hopelessness.

Isolation from being in a remote area and individual social network isolation, is typically a long-standing problem not amenable to quick resolution. Phone calls or emails lacked the non-verbal clues and sense of physical 'presence' found in face-to-face communication with like-minded people. This directness could be critical when helping employees deal with crises. Isolation from family and friends and the time and cost of air travel often compounded this.

#### **4.5.5 The broad scope of regional jobs**

The fifth reason affecting retention was the demands created by the broad scope of regional positions. Five managers emphasised that lower level jobs had much greater scope and responsibility than metropolitan counterparts, leaving some staff unable to cope, Jon stated:

"We also have some people that are just not suitable for the role, partly from our selection processes that don't effectively screen out those that will not cope well or are suited to the area ... sometimes you just don't know until they get here".

While other employees found the variety interesting and the broad scope helped them better address community problems, it remained difficult to fill vacancies with workers with the right skill-set, pressuring other team members with high workloads, stress, burnout and workers' compensation claims. Staff could make only incremental progress with important local issues such as overcrowding in state housing precincts where there were already limited employment opportunities in the town, neglect and anti-social behavioural issues or substance abuse, leaving them with a sense of burden. Leaders faced difficult issues as a result, Jon explained:

"In [this region] over the past 2.5 years we have not been at 100% occupancy of positions, we aim to operate at 80% of field positions at any one time".

"There have been some historical decisions of clear desperation to fill the role so that some of the work could get done, i.e. bums on seats, so people being appointed were not of the standard that you would expect in, say, the metro area. This leads to problems down the track. I think that it is best to keep the position vacant rather than fill it with someone who is not capable as this just leads to problems".

#### **4.5.6 Unrealistic expectations of regional life**

This theme involved unrealistic expectations of life in regional centres. New staff, particularly from the eastern states or overseas, lacked an understanding of the region or the problems of working remotely. The isolation and small size of regional WA towns was often well beyond their experience, and they typically experienced culture shock in dealing with a community with a strong 'ocker' culture or substantial indigenous cultural issues as previously highlighted in section 4.2.3 and 4.3.4.

Another shock was the harsh climate (weather), particularly inland where summers are extremely hot and relief from coastal breezes lacking, and in the north very humid as well. The ocean did not usually provide the recreational outlet often taken for granted by employees elsewhere due to the intense conditions in the north where the water is also hot and the marine life often dangerous. New recruits also underestimated the difficulty of creating work-life balance in small, closer-knit communities, Jon advised:

"It is difficult to get away from your work in comparison to metro, so the only way is to get out of the town which can result in driving for hundreds of kilometres or flying out, which is very expensive for a weekend".

Brienne, appeared to have successfully dealt with these issues through training:

"The lack of separation between work and personal life is not a real issue, because we provide some training at induction on how to manage those types of situations. That is really important to us with our young, new employees to provide them with those tools".

This response touches on many of the issues of regional work and life mentioned in earlier sections, such as separating work roles and personal life in smaller communities when employees become social contacts and community members become work clients, living in the public 'spotlight' as a community leader, and maintaining work-life balance in these circumstances. It is likely that such issues also present motivations to leave the job and barriers to recruitment of new staff.

#### **4.5.7 Lack of jobs for family members**

A related issue was a lack of job opportunities for partners or other adult family members of public sector staff. This was increasingly important to younger staff who were willing and able to move to, or around, regional areas as positions arose, where older generations needed to consider schooling and other effects on children. In some northern areas, the mining boom provided employment for family members, but such jobs were temporary, subject to a boom-and-bust cycle and mining employees tended to have short-term contracts.

#### **4.5.8 High cost of living or poor housing**

A final reason for leaving regional work was the high cost of living and sometimes the low quality of government housing, cited by three participants, Jon explained:

"In some areas, you are paying three times as much for your groceries. There are things that attempt to offset this [such as] the attraction and retention benefits, which helps, but it is still a factor".

Some centres offered good quality houses at low cost through a subsidised program, but others often had poor quality housing available through this program, Jon advised:

"Housing quality from government varies considerably in some of our locations from very good to very poor, it is a consideration if people are doing it tough then they may not want to stay long term".

#### **4.5.9 Summary**

Participants were divided on whether staff retention was a problem in their region, but those who didn't see it as a problem identified recruitment of suitably qualified staff as a problem. The causes of these problems reflect the difficulties of work in regional areas, particularly the lack of promotion or developmental opportunities, the broad scope of regional jobs, and the challenges of living in such an area: finding jobs for family members, limited education, health, shopping and recreation opportunities, isolation, the high cost of living, poor housing and adjusting to the climate and cultural landscape of regional centres.

Lack of opportunity for leadership development was not often mentioned directly, but such programs could assist with many of these issues, most obviously fulfilling employee's need for a career pathway and skills development, and secondly helping them deal with the greater breadth and depth of senior jobs in regional areas. Leadership development could also help prepare staff by developing community leadership networks and skills for dealing with the psychological issues of living and working in the same community by maintaining work-life balance, reducing isolation and adjusting

to different cultures. The next section discusses manager's views on the value of such programs.

#### **4.6 Would a leadership program improve retention?**

The next area of questioning concerned managers' views on whether leadership development would improve retention. Given that some managers saw the problem more in attraction than retention, the question was broadened to cover the general contribution of leadership development to other staffing issues. Discussions also covered the types of program, location, and desirable outcomes. Four themes were identified in the responses:

- Leadership development itself will not greatly increase retention (9);
- Leadership development as an attraction strategy (7);
- General benefits of a program (5), and;
- Program focus and location (5)

##### **4.6.1 Leadership development itself will not greatly increase retention**

As might be expected from answers to previous questions about the nature of work and factors affecting retention in regional offices, participants did not see leadership development as the sole or major solution to address retention, citing factors considered beyond the scope of such programs: the broader scope of jobs; the difficulty of getting permanency; employees staying only long enough to get promoted to another role; work-life imbalance and the difficulty of working in a small community; lack of jobs for family members; the local culture; isolation; limited local education, health and recreation facilities; and the weather, Cersei explained:

"Retention is not just a leadership problem, it is not something that can be fixed by attending a program".

Supported by Brienne:

“I don’t think in its own right it would reduce turnover as there are bigger issues around that that need fixing”.

Supported by Talisa:

“I can’t imagine it doing so as there are lots of issues that need to be addressed such as location and where they want to be”.

However, five participants felt a leadership program might reduce some of the important retention issues, Theon explained:

“I think that there are lots of issues about retention, but I think that if you can provide staff with some development it would mitigate against those factors raised”.

Supported by Brienne:

“The way we do our staff development and leadership coaching ... we know people stay with us for longer because they enjoy the experience and they become more committed”.

These managers thought a development program could help staff to gain promotion, address issues causing them to consider leaving, and develop leadership skills in the more diverse, dynamic and problem-focussed roles available in regional areas.

#### **4.6.2 Leadership development as an attraction strategy**

Three quarters of the managers felt a LDP could help attract new staff to their region even though it might not increase retention. Metropolitan employees might appreciate the opportunity to develop a career pathway, learn about and

connect to the local community and create work - life balance. In recognition of the agency's investment in them, staff would develop a sense of loyalty, encouraging them to stay and wait for a permanent position in a leadership role (if not already in one), an important consideration given the large number of short-term acting positions and fixed-term contracts. This would also encourage regional staff to move between regional offices.

Five managers expressed unreserved support for leadership development as a means of developing existing staff or attracting new ones, as Jon stated:

"I would love all my team leaders to participate in a leader program, it would be good for them, their teams".

One manager expressed the interesting notion that leadership development might change the values of an 'old guard' of conservative managers, typically older Anglo-Saxon males with a management style culture that fostered an organisational culture unwelcome to younger people and those from culturally diverse backgrounds. These managers resisted change in their region, as Sansa advised: *"they are actually stuck with such a passion for their community that it actually prevents change"*. Leadership development could facilitate a more diverse range of leaders, ultimately attracting more people and more diversity to the region.

#### **4.6.3 General benefits of a program**

Besides the specific attractions of better recruitment of new staff and preparing them for regional work and living, participants cited a number of benefits to existing staff and regional offices generally, including opening up career development opportunities, better succession planning and greater employee commitment and job satisfaction. More generally still, and perhaps most importantly, leaders might learn new perspectives on leading and managing, Margaery explained:

“I have gotten a lot out of the program I am currently doing, as I can now relate to the things my manager has been doing. I realise what he is talking about and it is not about micromanagement it is just a different way of doing it and that would be helpful to people”.

One manager considered leadership development essential in light of recent redundancies resulting in loss of senior staff with considerable experience and local knowledge. Their replacements were lower level, often new, having little experience or local knowledge and therefore struggling with their new roles.

Finally, one participant suggested regional LDPs could counter the widespread perception of regional staff as inferior to their metropolitan peers.

#### **4.6.4 Program focus and location**

Five participants suggested elements for the design of a program. These discussions were not actively pursued during the interview structure, as the original question was focussed on the impacts toward improving retention. These themes only came to light during the thematic analysis of the interviews and provided additional support to the development of the survey.

Mentoring was recommended, particularly for staff in senior roles. Diversity would be created by exposing participants to a range of public sector leaders from different backgrounds. One participant applauded a program for metropolitan leaders where participants were from all sectors (not for profit, public and private). The program operated for twelve to eighteen months and included a short secondment to a regional location, encouraging metropolitan leaders to consider moving to the country. The program also had strong alumni, with a culture where participants would become mentors for future programs, Cersei advised:



“They are part of an expansive learning journey; part of which is paying it back to the next participant so that a full bank of skills is developed, it is an ongoing focus and has strong alumni”.

Although this program seemed to hold several benefits for the regions, it also created a range of practical issues which made it unlikely to be fully replicated in a regional program. However, the mentoring feature could be replicated in a regional program, whereby participants are required to engage with future participants in the same region or in another region, starting localised alumni of past LDP participants.

Regarding location, participants offered two opposed perspectives. Three participants thought a centralised program (content and facilitators from Perth) but hosted in each regional centre would attract sufficient critical mass for economic efficiency while having the potential to address local issues and cultural constraints. Conversely, three managers highlighted the cost effectiveness and practical advantages of a central program run in Perth, since many regions lacked enough leaders for a local program. The cost of developing individual programs for each region combined with the lack of participants rules out decentralised leadership programs. However, centralisation in either location would also stretch regional offices by absencing key staff, and incurred costs as Margaery explained:

“It is cost prohibitive though as it is probably costing \$16-17K for me to attend some training at the moment.”

One manager suggested internet and videoconferencing technology would increasingly provide a viable medium for leadership development and when mixed with some face-to-face training this may be viable.

## **4.7 Summary**

The question of whether leadership development could improve retention in regional offices was the motivation for this study. As the previous section identified, participants saw leadership development having more benefit in attracting good candidates to their region than retaining existing ones. Many aspects of working and living in regional areas, meant staff otherwise lacking long-term ties to the region would not stay for long, and some had arrived with the intention of ultimately gaining promotion in Perth. Despite this, or indeed because of the need to attract better employees and help them integrate into the regional context, the managers were enthusiastic about the value of leadership development.

Added to this motivation was the benefits to existing employees who would not leave if they had a more defined career path, learn more about local community needs and members and develop a wider range of skills for future leadership roles. Skills such as resilience, maintaining work life balance, dealing with value conflicts and developing interpersonal relationships have been identified by participants as critical components for a regional leader. Newcomers to the region would also appreciate learning about the local context and often the general challenges of life in regional, remote or physically challenging environments. Basically, it was clear that the regions are hungry for any opportunities which will help them.

Overall, the interviews summarised in this chapter show regional managers did not have a good appreciation of the value of running leadership development in their offices, often having given the issue little thought, perhaps due to holding a view that head office would not consider it, lack of experience with such programs or concerns about cost, travel and time away from their duties. They did, however, identify many unique aspects of work and life in regional areas that brought challenges not faced by their city counterparts but also made regional jobs more varied and focused on visible improvements to

the local community. While many thought the intrinsic challenges of regional work and the motivations of some new recruits limited the usefulness of leadership development in improving retention, when discussing the topic in detail most saw broader benefits in attracting better staff and helping them adjust to the challenges of regional work and life, or up-skilling existing employees to increase job satisfaction and broaden their career development options.

The next chapter examines employee's attitudes on these issues, showing some clear differences between employees, aspirant leaders and those identified as holding leadership positions. Whilst this chapter provides the view of a select group of regional participants, the next chapter provides a broader view of the main research questions two to four from the employee perspective.

## **CHAPTER 5 SURVEY RESULTS**

### **5.1 Introduction**

To examine the attitudes of regional employees towards leadership and leadership development and their personal outlook on retention addressing the main research questions two to four, human resource managers from two regional WAPS agencies were asked to email an online survey link to approximately 10,500 regional employees in the Department of Agriculture and Food (DAFWA) and the WA Health Country Service (WACHS). Another 200 employees were contacted through the Regional Development Commissions (RDC) and other regional contacts, who also forwarded the survey to other WAPS agencies in their region.

A total of 156 responses were received. It is likely that the low response rate is largely due to the structure and operational focus of the two largest agencies, DAFWA and WACHS. Both are quasi-autonomous agencies whose members are employed through “specialist calling” positions. Due to the predominately outdoor and individualised specialisation on a scientific focus of DAFWA, they generally do not spend considerable time in the office and many would not have chosen to complete the survey due to competing priorities in their current role. Similarly, the WACHS workforce comprises predominately professional medical staff, who may not see this survey aligned with the medical focus of other surveys that may have been distributed. Other WACHS staff tend to have hospital support roles such as orderlies, cleaners and maintenance staff, many of whom would not use computers regularly and may not have seen its relevance to their work roles.

The online survey had five sections covering demographics, the skills required for leading regional workplaces, the leadership skills respondents would like to develop in themselves, options for developing regional leadership capability,

and factors affecting the retention of employees in regional areas. The response options involved nominal (e.g. in the demographic information such as employment level, Question 2), ordinal (e.g. in the leadership skills section such as ranking the 'top ten skills', Question 10) and interval scales (e.g. in the retention section such as factors affecting satisfaction, Question 19). The demographic questions tended to use nominal scales and Likert-scales were used for the questions on leadership skills, leadership development and retention. Some questions asked respondents to rank the importance of their qualitative responses, these will be presented and clarified within each section.

## **5.2 Respondents' demographics**

Overall, the sample appears to reflect the wider regional WAPS workforce in terms of employment level, management position, industry and age (Wauchope, 2016b). Almost seventy percent of respondents were permanent full-time employees, with sixteen percent identifying as fixed-term contract staff. In terms of WAPS employment levels, forty percent were between levels 1 and 3, twenty percent at levels 4 and 5, thirteen percent at level 6, and twenty-six percent at level 7 or above. Over four out of ten respondents (42%) held management positions. Thus, respondents in this sample were largely in what would be considered non-leadership positions.

### **5.2.1 Sector**

Over half the respondents (56%) were in the health and human services sector, reflecting the size of the WACHS as one of the three targeted agencies. The next largest groups were emergency services (12%), agriculture and environment (6.5%), and education (5%). The response rate for the health and human services and agriculture and environment sectors are representative of the survey being distributed to WACHS and DAFWA due to the large employment base in the regions. Despite the Department of Education being the largest regional employer, a lower response rate occurred due to the

inability of the researcher to effectively distribute this survey to large numbers of employees. The mid-level response rate from the emergency services sector is explained due to the WA Police being the third largest employer in the regions and the interviewer being able to distribute the survey to some contacts in the WA Police. The response rate is reflective of their size (Wauchope, 2016b), despite the challenges in accessing regional employee distribution lists for the agency.

### **5.2.2 Age and qualifications**

Respondent's age was also judged to reflect the broader regional WAPS profile (Wauchope, 2016b), 'under 24 years' with 4.2% (4% for the sector) and 'over 45 years' 54.2% (53% for the sector). The most common age group was '50-54 years' with 22% of respondents. The regions tend to have an older workforce, as demonstrated here with 'over 55 years' being 22%. Finally, eighty-eight percent of respondents were qualified at a diploma level or higher, of which fifty-five percent held at least a bachelor degree and thirty-five percent had post graduate qualifications. This appears to reasonably well reflect the proportion of professional roles in regional agencies (Wauchope, 2016b), perhaps slightly exaggerated by the number of respondents in health where tertiary qualifications are a minimum requirement.

### **5.2.3 Regional representation**

The largest group of respondents were from the Great Southern Region (32%), followed by the South West (16%) and the Wheatbelt (15%), reflecting the support for this survey by the Regional Development Commissions in those regions.

Interestingly, sixty-seven percent of the respondents reported having previously worked in another regional location, consistent with comments made in the interviews that regional employees often transfer between regions. This means responses to questions about regions do not necessarily reflect the region a respondent is currently in, presumably broadening the view of

regional work in this study. As this research is exploratory in nature, comparisons between individual regions have not been conducted.

#### **5.2.4 Length of service**

Nearly half (45.7%) of the respondents indicated having worked in regional areas for eleven years or more, and sixty-nine percent had done so for six years or more. The difference of twenty-three percent suggests the propensity to leave regional WA was strongest between six and ten years of service, with a further drop of almost eight and a half percent (8.5%) to the proportion having worked fifteen or more years in regional areas.

#### **5.2.5 Demographic summary**

Overall, the sample demographics generally meet expectations of the regional WAPS workforce, with perhaps a slight skew towards older and more educated staff reflecting the specific agencies targeted. It is considered that these demographics enhance the results as respondents are older, more experienced and have higher levels of education, resulting in respondents being able to provide experience driven answers about leadership, regional expectations and retention issues.

### **5.3 Leadership skills for regional workplaces**

This section supports the main research question two. Respondents were asked to choose the ten leadership skills most important to a regional leader from a list of fifteen identified from the interviews and literature review. To give some sense of the importance of each skill, they were asked to place five into the 'most required' category (Table 5.1) and five into the 'next most required' category (Table 5.2). This response strategy was chosen as an alternative to ranking all the items, while still requiring respondents to consciously compare all possible items. A free-text response option allowed them to include any additional skills. Appendix 3 provides the data used across this section.

**Table 5.1 “Most Important” Regional Leadership Skills – All respondents**

Rank	Skill	Freq.	Percent
1	Communication skills	117	75
2	Integrity in decision making	81	52
3	Building relationships	68	44
4	Taking action, follow through on decisions	67	43
5	Problem solving	61	39
=6	Developing staff	47	30
=6	Managing conflict and negotiation	46	30
=7	Administration and organisation	26	17
=7	Maintain wellness / work life balance	26	17
8	Knowledge of local area	25	16
=9	Innovation	24	15
=9	Recruiting people	24	15
10	Goal setting and time management	22	14
11	Select the right people for a project	17	11
12	Making sense of reports / accounts	8	5

(n = 156).

**Table 5.2 “Next Most Important” Regional Leadership Skills – All respondents**

Rank	Skill	Freq.	Percent
1	Developing staff	62	40
=2	Managing conflict and negotiation	61	39
=2	Goal setting & time management	61	39
3	Select right people for a project	55	35
4	Knowledge of local area	51	33
5	Administration and organisation	46	29
6	Innovation	45	29
=7	Maintain wellness / work life balance	42	27
=7	Integrity in decision making	42	27
=7	Problem solving	42	27
8	Taking action, follow through on decisions	41	26
=9	Making sense of reports and accounts	35	22
=9	Building relationships	34	22
=9	Recruiting people	34	22
10	Communication skills	7	4

(n = 156).



Table 5.1 shows that of the fifteen items identified by far the most frequently chosen item in the 'top five' group was "Communications skills", chosen by seventy-five percent of respondents.

The next most important was "Integrity in decision-making" and "Building relationships", which is reflective of the leadership literature, where these trait based descriptions have consistently been reported over the past century (Northouse, 2016) . In looking at the types of skills that have been selected, it is interesting to see the list changes from a leader centric view toward an awareness of the follower at item six, through to the situation at eighth and finally management tasks based skills. This closely reflects the evolution of leadership literature (Day & Antonakis, 2012).

Examination of responses sorted into the secondary tier of leadership skills (Table 5.2) showed that of the fifteen identified items, as expected, items high in this table were moderate in the 'top ten' grouping. This supports the conclusion that the skills listed at the top of Table 5.1 are indeed the most highly rated. One exception was goal setting and time management, which does not appear particularly important in Table 5.1 but perhaps should be added to the 'top' group.

Local knowledge also appeared in both the top ten and middle ten groupings, suggesting respondents were divided about its value. It may be that some thought it could be obtained through experience, where others saw it as sufficiently critical that it should be explicitly mentioned.

Surprisingly, both "Innovation" and "Maintaining wellness / work life balance" did not rate highly in either the 'most important' or in this second tier of 'next most important' skills as the researcher anticipated. These two categories were incorporated into the survey based on the information obtained in the interviews. Interviewed participants suggested that innovation was essential in

effectively achieving the agency objectives, particularly so when faced with limited financial and physical resources. This is a similar case with work life balance where participants reported that employees and leaders struggle with the community / cultural aspects of country life and the lack of anonymity provided in regional locations. These matters are reviewed in the next section with respect to developmental need.

It is also interesting to see the variation between the 'top five' and the 'next five' for the skills of "Recruiting" and "Selecting the right people for projects". Both were incorporated because of the interviews which highlighted the difficulty in recruiting staff to the regions and the higher frequency of staff being recent graduates, immigrants or having limited (often nil) regional experience. Both these skills were ranked toward the bottom in the 'most important' list. However, in the 'next most important' list, "Selecting the right person for a project" was ranked third, quite a significant rise in importance. This result could have been generated due to the influence of situational leadership theory (Northouse, 2016), where the leader starts to consider the competence and capability of the follower to achieve the outcome.

It is also useful to examine the skills ranked in the bottom five of the fifteen (Appendix 3). Those deemed least important (some ranked equally) to regional leadership were:

- "Making sense of reports and accounts";
- "Recruiting people";
- "Maintaining wellness and work life balance";
- "Innovation";
- "Administration and organisational skills", and;
- "Selecting the right people for projects".

It is perhaps not surprising that specific finance, HR, occupational health and organisational skills are least important as these are more management than

leadership skills, and are presumably often available through specialist local or head office staff. Consistent with this, these did not appear in the 'top ten' grouping, similarly, "Communication" and "Integrity in decision making" were placed in the bottom two positions of this 'least important' group by less than two percent of respondents.

Overall, the dominant responses to this question reflect traditional leadership attributes embodied or implied in theories of situational, transformational and authentic leadership: communication skills, integrity, relationship building (including negotiation and dealing with conflict), staff development, decisiveness and problem solving.

Arguably, in regional areas the diversity of demands on managers and the more personalised cultures in small offices where staff also socialise outside work (noted by participants in the interviews) mean leadership itself is at a premium; and therefore, it is likely that employees would expect managers to be capable of generating voluntary followership through their social skills rather than relying solely on their professional expertise or managerial authority.

Thirty-eight respondents offered additional comments on critical skills which have been categorised into themes by the researcher, as displayed in Table 5.3. Some of the comments provided did not relate to leadership skills and have not been included: for example, staff meetings and rosters.

Interestingly, four free text responses indicated that skills should not be viewed in isolation, rather "all of the skills above are critical ... it is like a watch that cannot operate if you leave out parts" or "skills change according to your issue at a point in time" or "All of these skills are important". This too is consistent with the tenet of situational and contingency leadership theories that there is "no one right way to lead" (Northouse, 2016).

**Table 5.3 Additional “Critical” skills for Regional Leaders – All respondents**

<b>Additional Skill</b>	<b>Freq.</b>
Respecting members (consistent / transparent / equitable)	12
Empowerment of staff (delegate / encourage / supportive)	10
Experience in core technical skills	6
Knowledge of strategy / organisation	4
All of the above skills	4
Ability to juggle multiple issues	3
Part of team (approachable / adaptable)	3
Emotional intelligence	2

**(Derived from n = 38).**

The highest rated theme (classified by the researcher) was “Respecting team members” which included listening to, trusting and being consistent and transparent with decisions towards employees. This theme was separate to the “Empowerment of staff” which included developing, delegating to, encouraging staff and enabling them to complete a job task fully and independently. “Experience in core technical skills” were firmly directed toward core technical specialist competency and currency in the profession with comments including *“a leader should have good knowledge of the processes, experience and skills in the specific field of practice”* and *“positions change over time..., the leader needs to maintain currency on the latest trends”*. These comments did not include skills such as finance or human relations. Finally, the theme (classified by the researcher) “Knowledge of the strategic direction” of the agency incorporated matters such as knowing what the higher level strategic direction of the agency was and navigating the internal operations of the organisation to achieve the strategic direction.

### **5.3.1 Regional leader’s views on leadership**

The above information relates to all levels and classifications of employees and how they view regional leadership. It is important to also consider the views of those that currently hold regional leadership positions and ascertain if there are any significant differences between employees and leaders. This

section identifies the data of those respondents that identified themselves as holding a leadership position (n = 61) in Table 5.4 and those that, by virtue of their level that is level 6 and above would generally hold a management position in a regional location (n = 60) in Table 5.5. Similar analysis was conducted on these sub sets of the data to obtain specific results from these categories of respondents. Comparison is then made between all respondents (Table 5.2), the self-identified leaders (Table 5.4) and level 6+ (Table 5.5). Table 5.6 provides a comparison of the 'next most' important skills across the three groups.

**Table 5.4 “Most Important” Regional Leadership Skills – Leaders only**

Rank	Skill	Freq.	Percent
1	Communication skills	48	17
=2	Building relationships	33	12
=2	Integrity in decision making	33	12
3	Problem solving	27	10
=4	Taking action, follow through on decisions	23	8
=4	Developing staff	23	8
5	Managing conflict and negotiation	18	6
6	Recruiting people	14	5
7	Goal setting and time management	13	5
8	Innovation	11	4
9	Knowledge of the local area	10	4
10	Maintain wellness, work / life balance	10	4
11	Administration and organisational skills	9	3
12	Select right people for project	6	2
13	Making sense of reports or accounts	1	0

(n = 61).

**Table 5.5 “Most Important” Regional Leadership Skills – Level’s 6 and above, aspirant leaders**

Rank	Skill	Freq.	Percent
1	Communication skills	47	18
2	Building relationships	36	13
3	Integrity in decision making	34	13
4	Problem solving	25	9
5	Taking action, follow through on decisions	23	9
=6	Developing staff	15	6
=6	Managing conflict and negotiation	15	6
7	Maintain wellness, work / life balance	14	5
8	Innovation	13	5
=9	Knowledge of the local area	11	4
=9	Recruiting people	11	4
10	Goal setting and time management	10	4
11	Administration and organisational skills	7	3
12	Select right people for project	5	2
13	Making sense of reports or accounts	1	0

(n = 60).

**Table 5.6 Comparison of “Next Most Important” Regional Leadership Skills**

Skill	Ranking		
	Overall	Leader	Level 6+
Developing staff	1	=2	1
Managing conflict and negotiation	=2	=3	=2
Goal setting & time management	=2	=2	3
Select right people for a project	3	1	4
Knowledge of local area	4	=2	=2
Administration and organisation	5	4	5
Innovation	6	=3	=7
Maintain wellness / work life balance	=7	7	10
Integrity in decision making	=7	=5	=7
Problem solving	=7	6	=9
Taking action, follow through on decisions	8	=5	6
Making sense of reports and accounts	=9	10	8
Building relationships	=9	9	=9
Recruiting people	=9	8	=7
Communication skills	10	11	11

As can be seen in Table 5.4 and 5.5, the 'top five' skills rated by self-identified leader and level 6+ aspirant leader are identical for the first five skills. Differences of view occurred from the sixth ranked item whereby leaders viewed the skill of "Recruiting people" (Table 5.4) over "Maintain wellness, work / life balance" (Table 5.5 ranked 7<sup>th</sup>) as being more important. This supports views identified in the interviews that recruiting people is a major challenge in the regions, whilst those who are senior in the organisation but may not hold a direct leadership position (level 6+) view the balance of work and life in the region as more valuable.

In comparing the "Next most important" set of leadership skills, mixed results were found across the three groups (Table 5.6). Despite this, commonality was evident for those skills seen as also being important for regional leaders with "Developing staff", "Managing conflict and negotiation" and "Goal setting and time management" all listed in the top three across the groups. Interestingly, "Selecting the right people for projects" was also a close contender, with leaders viewing this as the most important skill for this second tier, highlighting the need that leaders focus on achieving results previously identified in Chapter 4 (4.3.1).

Consistent with the previous comments, "Maintaining wellness / work life balance" did not rate highly in either the 'most important' or in this second tier of 'next most important' skills. However, self-identified leaders rated "Innovation" as third in this second tier, supporting comments provided in Chapter 4 by interviewees that felt this was a critical skill in regional leadership.

### **5.3.2 Summary on regional leadership skills**

Interestingly, "Communication" was consistently rated as the top skill across all three classifications of data (all respondents, self-identified leaders and level 6+), with both "Building relationships" and "Integrity in decision making" in the top three. The only difference being that all respondents placed "Integrity

in decision making” over “Building relationships” in comparison to the sub sets of data (self-identified leaders and level 6+). This may stem from the perspective that employees are subject to the outcomes or impacts of a leader’s decision which is supported by the comments provided in the free text option (Table 5.3) where respecting team members and empowerment of staff are mentioned.

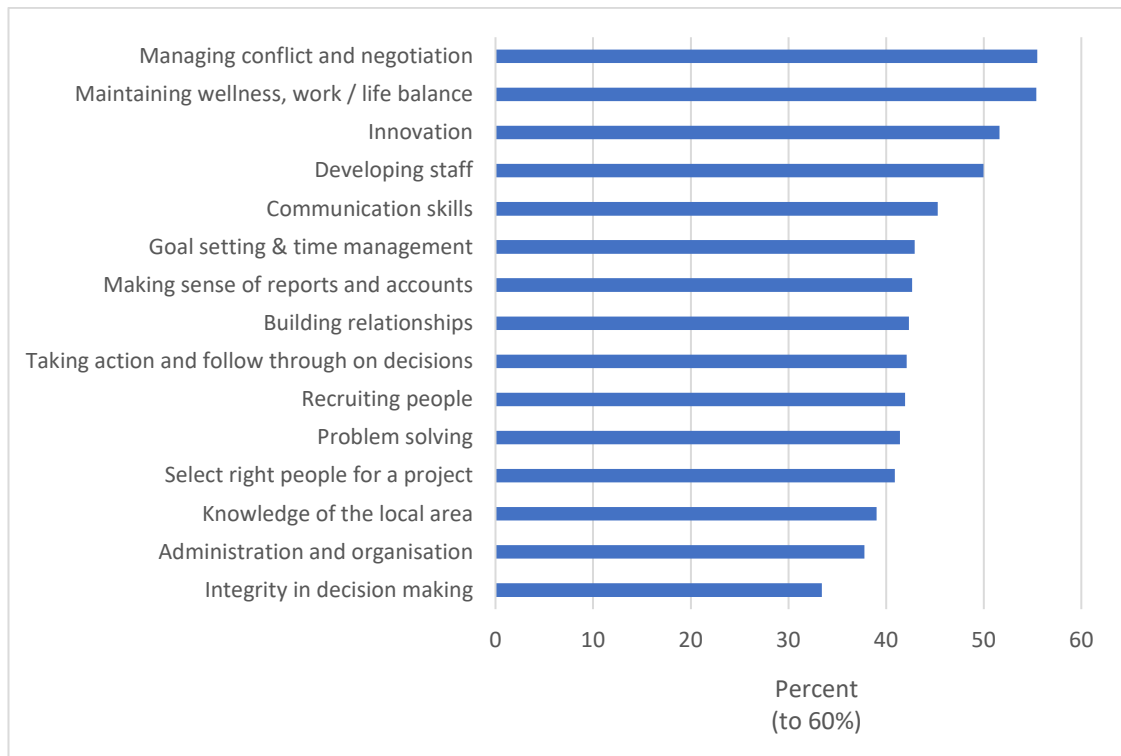
In analysing the free text items and the data described in the various tables, the overall conclusion is that the important qualities for regional leaders can be summarised as good interpersonal skills (communication, building relationships and showing integrity, concern for staff development, and managing conflict and negotiation) and flexible general managerial competence (decisiveness, problem solving, and relevant technical skills).

#### **5.4 Developing respondents’ leadership skills**

Using the list of leadership skills discussed above, all respondents were asked which skills they would like to develop in themselves on a scale from 0 to 100 (indicating a high need). Appendix 4 provides the data used across this section.

The purpose of this question was to consider the current skills gap for regional employees and ascertain how these might influence the development of a regional LDP, as per the main research question three. A total of 114 of the 156 respondents ( $n = 114$ ) answered this question, with fifty-two self-identified as leaders and forty-nine being level six and above. Responses were fairly evenly distributed across the categories, with the mean scores ranging from thirty-three to fifty-six percent, Figure 5.1 highlights these results, with the graph shown below ranging from 0-60%.





**Figure 5.1 Respondents' Leadership Development Needs.**

The 'top five' responses were predominantly soft skills such as "managing conflict and negotiation", with the next grouping mostly being general management competencies such as "making sense of reports". This however, provides limited statistical value and requires further analysis using measures of central tendency and descriptive summary measures. The mean ( $\mu$ ), median (Md), mode (Mo) and standard deviation ( $\sigma$ ) assisted in this process (Table 5.7).

The initial assessment indicates that the data is mostly symmetrical (zero-skewed) as the mean and median are of similar value ( $\mu = \text{Md}$ ) with only minor skews occurring to the left or right as indicated. This enables a normal distribution to be utilised, thus the skills "Managing conflict and negotiation" ( $\mu = 56 \pm 2\sigma$ ), and "Innovation" ( $\mu = 52 \pm 2\sigma$ ) are over two standard deviations from the mean (over ninety-five percent of the data) which highlights their statistical significance of being in the tier of "requiring development".

**Table 5.7 Respondents' Leadership Development Needs – All respondents**

Rank	Skill	$\mu$	Md.	Mo	$\sigma$	$\sigma$ from $\mu$
1	Managing conflict and negotiation	56	60.5	50	26.42	2.10
2	Maintaining wellness, work / life balance	55	60.0	50	30.9	1.79
3	Innovation	52	52.5	50	24.3	2.12
4	Developing staff	50	52.5	50	28.99	1.72
5	Communication skills	45	50.0	20	26.23	1.73
=6	Goal setting & time management	43	49.5	50	26.79	1.60
=6	Making sense of reports and accounts	43	44.0	20	27.4	1.56
=7	Building relationships	42	48.5	50	25.49	1.66
=7	Taking action and follow through on decisions	42	50.0	50	25.36	1.66
=7	Recruiting people	42	40.0	0	31.01	1.35
=8	Problem solving	41	43.0	60	25.39	1.63
=8	Select right people for a project	41	46.5	0	27.35	1.50
9	Knowledge of the local area	39	35.5	20	28.41	1.37
10	Administration and organisation	38	38.5	0	25.11	1.50
11	Integrity in decision making	33	29.0	0	25.67	1.30

**(n = 114).**

This is similar for the other 'top five' skills requiring development which have standard deviations higher than one point seven. Interestingly, analysis of the median (the middle value of ordered array) for these 'top five' skills indicate that when respondents rated a development need above the fifty percent mark (Md = 50 to 60.5), however when reviewing the mode (most frequently appearing number) respondents often selected the fifty percent. This indicates that although respondents identified these skills as requiring development,

they were unable to assess how much development they needed due to the subjective nature of personal development.

Other interesting points identified when reviewing the list of skills, are with “Problem solving”, whereby the mode of sixty (Mo = 60) indicates that respondents felt the need for extra development in this area. Not surprising was the low responses toward the operationally based skills of “Recruiting people”, “Selecting the right people for projects” and “Administration and organisation” which were all below a median of forty-six with a mode of zero, indicating that many respondents did not seek development in these areas.

This was mirrored by “Integrity in decision making” which seems contradictory to information presented by respondents in the previous section 5.3 whereby this skill was ranked second overall and third by both the sub set groups of leaders and level six and above as a ‘top five’ required skill. Also, given the representation with the free text response themed “respecting members (consistent / transparent / equitable / fair)” in that section there may be self-bias toward the effectiveness of decision making.

A free text option was provided with this question, asking respondents to identify any additional leadership skills that they would like development in which were not already provided in the above list. Twenty-five respondents offered additional comments, with the researcher identifying the main themes in Table 5.8.

**Table 5.8 Additional issues identified by all respondents**

<b>Additional Skill</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Access to education / development opportunity	6
Career progression movement required to progress	5
Managing performance	2
Fiscal management – budget funding sources	2
Business intelligence systems / change management	2

**(n= 25, not all responses are included).**

The researcher found that respondents provided some comments that were not related to leadership development, for example improved rostering. Of the themes that did relate to additional development, respondents identified management based skills such as information technology, business related skills (finance, recruitment, occupational safety and health) and performance management related skills.

An interesting view was found with one of the performance management related comments, which indicated that the concern was not necessarily about underperformance rather that the individual did not have the capability to perform the role. The other comments produced for this question did not address skills development but highlighted wider issues facing the regions and supporting comments provided in the interviews, for example access to development opportunity and career progression. These comments reinforce the perception noted in Chapter 4 and later in this chapter that regional employees are isolated, and disadvantaged compared to their metropolitan counterparts, but since they don't bear on the issue of leadership development they are not further discussed in this section but will be included in the retention section later in this chapter.

Overall, respondents, who were employees not necessarily in leadership positions, considered their own developmental needs to primarily involve the soft skills of leadership along with innovation, and beyond that a range of technical or operational skills. This finding suggests leadership development

centred on soft skills would have broad appeal in regional offices and should not necessarily be targeted at senior managers.

## **5.5 Design of a regional leadership program**

This section comprised two parts and responds to the main research question three. The first, addressed the components of a regional LDP whilst the second enabled respondents to comment on what format (duration, type of sessions) and how a program might be implemented. Appendix 5 provides the data used across this section.

In the first part of this section, respondents were also asked to select their 'top five' options but this time for a LDP for regional staff, followed by five options of secondary importance. A free text response option was also provided to enable respondents to include any other program components not already identified. All respondents answered this question (n=156) with Table 5.9 providing the results for the 'most important' responses and Table 5.10 the 'next most important'. The most popular options in the 'most important' category, however show a low frequency with little differentiation between the top responses. This indicates that the respondents had great inconsistency with how a regional leadership program might be implemented in the regions.

It is evident though that Perth based options were not popular, with all the options having this component ranked in the bottom five (below 10%) of responses. This could stem from a range of reasons such as the cost implications, the availability of staff to cover the workload of the absent team member and the impacts of being away from the family. In contrast, the "Full day workshop session in the region", ranked highly as it provides a compromise between these issues of travel and the flow on effects on the office, when someone attends training.

**Table 5.9 “Most Important” Leadership Development Program Options – All respondents**

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Option</b>	<b>Freq.</b>	<b>Percent</b>
1	Full day workshop session in region	45	29
2	Formal coaching	42	27
3	Mentoring – regional manager (in the region)	40	26
4	Networking sessions	38	24
5	Project work to practice skills	37	24
6	Mentoring – specialist manager (region based)	36	23
7	5 day course in region	35	22
=8	Skills gap analysis test	31	20
=8	3hr workshop session in region	31	20
9	Online / video conference	27	17
=10	Job shadowing – current manager	25	16
=10	Job shadowing – other regional manager	25	16
11	Mentoring – regional manager (out of the region)	19	12
12	University study	16	10
13	5 day course in Perth	14	9
14	Full day workshop session in Perth	13	8
15	Mentoring – specialist manager (Perth based)	12	8
16	Job shadowing – Perth manager	9	6
17	3hr workshop session in Perth	3	2

**(n = 156).**

**Table 5.10 “Next Most Important” Program Options – All respondents**

Rank	Option	Freq.	Percent
1	Mentoring – specialist manager (region based)	37	24
2	Mentoring – regional manager (out of the region)	36	23
=3	Job shadowing – other regional manager	32	21
=3	Mentoring – specialist manager (Perth based)	32	21
4	Formal coaching	31	20
=5	Networking sessions	30	19
=5	Mentoring – regional manager (in the region)	30	19
6	Full day workshop session in region	28	18
=7	Skills gap analysis test	27	17
=7	Online / video conference	27	17
8	Job shadowing – current manager	26	17
=9	Project work to practice skills	24	15
=9	5 day course in region	24	15
=9	5 day course in Perth	24	15
10	Full day workshop session in Perth	22	14
11	University study	20	13
12	3hr workshop session in region	19	12
13	Job shadowing – Perth manager	18	12
14	3hr workshop session in Perth	14	9

**(n = 156).**

Interestingly, job shadowing a regional manager, including the current manager and mentoring provided by a regional manager from another region were also not popular options all hovering around fifteen percent of responses. The low response for job shadowing the current manager is likely due to the already small offices that exist in the regions and the requirement for staff to be across many of the roles in the office. As such respondents may not have identified this as a relevant future option as it already occurs. The low response on mentoring from a regional manager from another region could be due to the difficulty of travelling and engaging with another region, similarly to those identified with Perth.

In comparing the “Next most important” set of program options (Table 5.10), results highlight the desire for mentoring from regional leaders or a specialist

manager. Both formalised coaching and the opportunity to network also ranked high showing the consistency with the 'most important' grouping as important inclusions to a LDP. Again, Perth based options (except the specialist manager) were all ranked in the bottom six reinforcing the low appeal of Perth as a development location.

It is interesting to note the difference between the poor ranking for "Mentoring – regional manager (out of the region)" in the 'top five' to the high ranking here, indicating that respondents are seeking the experience of individuals who are exposed to similar issues. The same can be said for gaining specialist knowledge, whereby the preference is to obtain this from a regional source over a metropolitan source. The higher ranking of the Perth based specialist here though is indicative that the specialist option may not be available as a dedicated position in a regional setting, with the option defaulting to the metropolitan specialist.

The "least preferred" options (Appendix 5), those not chosen in the 'top ten', involved LDP in Perth and university study, highlighting the challenge of travelling to the capital city. The consistently low response of university study also indicates that respondents were not looking for recognition of a formalised qualification and/or their learning to be highly formalised and well-structured. The low response could also indicate that respondents are not seeking development from someone not familiar with the WAPS environment. It also indicates that they are not looking for a long-term commitment.

The consistent mid-level ranking of skills gap analysis, video conferencing, five day workshops, three hour seminars, and job shadowing other staff are available options, but are not overly preferred by the respondents, with face to face and less oversight or micro-managed options taking precedence. The eight free-text responses had no common themes and only reinforced the development of skills options that were already discussed in section 5.3 such as external business management training.



### 5.5.1 Regional leader's views on a leadership development program

Similar analysis was conducted on sub sets of those respondents that identified themselves as holding a leadership position (n = 61) in Table 5.11 and those who, by virtue of their level that is level 6 and above would often hold a management position in a regional location (n = 60) in Table 5.12 for the program option data. Table 5.13 provides the comparisons between all three groups for the 'next most important' list of options.

**Table 5.11 “Most Important” Program Options – Leaders only**

Rank	Option	Freq.	Percent
1	Formal coaching	27	44
2	Full day workshop session in region	23	38
3	Mentoring – specialist manager (region based)	20	33
=4	Networking sessions	18	30
=4	Skills gap analysis test	18	30
=5	3hr workshop session in region	17	28
=5	Mentoring – regional manager (in the region)	17	28
6	Job shadowing – other regional manager	16	26
7	Project work to practice skills	15	25
=8	Online / video conference	14	23
=8	5 day course in region	14	23
9	Mentoring – regional manager (out of the region)	11	18
10	Full day workshop session in Perth	9	15
11	University study	8	13
=12	Job shadowing – current manager	7	11
=12	5 day course in Perth	7	11
=12	Mentoring – specialist manager (Perth based)	7	11
13	Job shadowing – Perth manager	3	5
14	3hr workshop session in Perth	2	3

(n = 61).

**Table 5.12 “Most Important” Program Options – Level 6 and above, aspirant leaders**

Rank	Option	Freq.	Percent
1	Formal coaching	28	47
2	Full day workshop session in region	22	37
3	Networking sessions	20	33
=4	Skills gap analysis test	19	32
=4	3hr workshop session in region	19	32
5	Mentoring – specialist manager (region based)	17	28
=6	Online / video conference	16	27
=6	Mentoring – regional manager (in the region)	16	27
7	5 day course in region	15	25
8	Project work to practice skills	14	23
=9	Job shadowing – other regional manager	12	20
=9	Mentoring – regional manager (out of the region)	12	20
=10	Full day workshop session in Perth	7	12
=10	Mentoring – specialist manager (Perth based)	7	12
=11	University study	6	10
=11	5 day course in Perth	6	10
12	Job shadowing – current manager	5	8
13	Job shadowing – Perth manager	4	7
14	3hr workshop session in Perth	2	3

**(n = 60).**

**Table 5.13 Comparison on Rankings “Next Most important” -  
Development Program**

Option	Ranking		
	Overall	Leader	Level 6+
Mentoring – regional manager (out of the region)	2	2	1
Networking sessions	=5	3	=2
Mentoring – specialist manager (region based)	1	7	=2
5 day course in region	=9	=5	3
Full day workshop session in region	6	=5	=4
Mentoring – specialist manager (Perth based)	=3	1	=4
Job shadowing – other regional manager	=3	=6	=5
Project work to practice skills	=9	=6	=5
Skills gap analysis test	=7	=6	=5
Mentoring – regional manager (in the region)	=5	4	=5
Online / video conference	=7	=5	6
Job shadowing – current manager	8	=9	=7
Formal coaching	4	=8	=7
University study	11	=9	=7
Full day workshop session in Perth	10	10	=7
5 day course in Perth	=9	=8	=7
3hr workshop session in region	12	11	8
Job shadowing – Perth manager	13	=9	=9
3hr workshop session in Perth	14	12	=9

Like the earlier results provided by all respondents (Table 5.9), the two sets of leader responses showed a consistent view of the ‘most important’ options with only minor variations in ranking order for the top four choices. The most popular options in the ‘most important’ category, however showed a low frequency with little differentiation between the top seven responses, again indicating that the respondents had great inconsistency with how a regional leadership program might be implemented in the regions.

In comparing the 'most important' program options between the two leader sub groups, the list of options is almost identical for the first five skills. The only difference occurs with mentoring from a Perth based specialist manager being ranked higher by self-identified leaders. This supports the comments identified in Chapter 4 where it was suggested that there is a lack of specialist knowledge in the regions.

Of note is the much higher response on "Skills gap testing" with both groups ranking this as number four in comparison to all respondents ranked eighth. This highlights an interest in a more individualised approach and monitoring of progress toward their personal development for these two groups. It also recognises that they already possess some components of leadership capability and are seeking specific development and feedback on their shortcomings. This is supported with the high rankings of both formal coaching and mentoring in specialist areas.

In comparing the "Next most important" set of development program options (Table 5.13), the distinction between leaders and level 6+ aspirant leader preferences are more prevalent. Self-identified leaders are predominately seeking mentoring with the variation on this option selected for four of the top five "next most important" development options. Of note is the "Specialist manager from Perth" being most sought after by current regional leaders, which echoes comments in Chapter 4 where specialist skills are lacking in the regions. Interestingly, the mentoring from a regional specialist manager was ranked in seventh position further supporting the idea that specialist skills were lacking, and perhaps that regional specialists were not as current as their metropolitan counterparts.

In the second part of this section, another question with free text responses asked what format a leadership program should take, considering the number and duration of sessions and program length.

The fifty-nine responses mainly focussed on regional options with some not specifying a location. A range of durations and formats were provided with multiple combinations offered such as *“one day a month over several months or even a year”*.

Throughout the various responses, themes such as job shadowing, coaching and mentoring also featured highly by the respondents.

As no two responses were identical, the options were reviewed, and themes identified by the researcher. Classification occurred for the format, frequency of the format, location and duration with findings presented in Table 5.14. Responses that recorded a single classification have not been included, however, one response was interesting and stood out, as the respondent recommended a residential course, but did not provide a location or duration of the course. Being residential however, one would assume that it would be in Perth.

**Table 5.14 Implementation options of Regional Leadership Development Program – All respondents**

Format	Frequency of Format	Held in Region Y/N	Duration	
			2-3 months	Every month
Week long (3-5 days)	9	Y	Y	
Full day (annually)	8	Y		Y
Info session with networking	4			
Online	4			
3 day long course	4			
Full day (not specified)	3	Y	Y	
Video conference	3	Y		Y
4 sessions annually	2	Y		
1/2 day (6 months)	2	Y		Y

**(n = 59).**

The most common response in the format was an entire day, local (regional) workshop with eleven responses. The duration alternated between every month for a year (eight) or every two to three months (three) with nothing indicated on when this might conclude.

A longer but compact regional program of three to five full days' duration was a second option (nine respondents) again held locally with the option of the three day session held over a number of months. A further three other respondents identified a three day course but failed to provide any other clarifying comments as to the location or duration. The third choice was a combination of shorter sessions as potential half days every month or two (two respondents) or four sessions over the course of a year (two respondents). The design of these style sessions would minimise the impact on the workplace.

### **5.5.2 Summary on the design of a leadership development program**

Overall, the options suggested involved standard leadership development activities as identified in the research, with formal programs and mentoring or coaching as popular options (Bradley et al., 2017). As two thirds of the employees responded, it appears there is considerable demand for LDPs among staff who do not necessarily hold leadership positions. Like the interviewed participants from Chapter 4, responses presented (Table 5.9) showed a low frequency with little differentiation between the options, indicating that the respondents had great inconsistency with how a regional leadership program might be implemented in the regions. The most popular options however indicated that local activities in the regions, of shorter durations were dominant over other Perth based options. Formalised and well-structured programs also rated poorly.

## 5.6 Retention in regional offices

Respondents were asked a series of questions about their intention to leave their job and the region, covering potential work-based reasons for leaving, where they would seek new employment and any local issues that might contribute to a decision to leave. These questions address the main research question four. Appendix 6 provides the data used across this section.

### 5.6.1 Factors encouraging respondents to leave their job

Respondents were given a list of reasons that could contribute to a decision to leave their current position in the next two years, and asked to rate each on a scale from 0 to 100 (high contribution). Ninety-one respondents answered this question. The lower response rate could indicate that the remaining respondents were not looking to leave “the job”, that is, their WAPS profession in the near future and thus chose to not answer the question. This is a peculiarity of the public sector as some government agencies still operate with a transfer and posting system whereby a person does not leave the job role but is moved between locations whilst maintaining status, financial and recognition of service benefits associated with the role.

As the question asked whether these factors *could* contribute to leaving their job responses do not reflect an *intention* to leave, but the high response rate may suggest a significant level of dissatisfaction as indicated in Table 5.15.

It is not surprising that the ‘top five’ responses are common reasons for leaving a job, but the high proportion of respondents citing work factors as possible motivations over the next two years, coupled with the shortage of job opportunities in regional areas and the costs of moving (recognising that some respondents may have access to relocation allowances from the department), appear to suggest a high level of dissatisfaction with respondents’ jobs. However, the standard deviation highlights that some respondents were more dissatisfied than others with their job ( $\mu \pm \sigma = 22$  to 96).

**Table 5.15 Factors encouraging respondents to leave – All respondents**

Rank	Factor to leave	$\mu$	Md.	Mo	$\sigma$	$\sigma$ from $\mu$
1	Job dissatisfaction	59	70	100	37	1.60
2	Family responsibility	56	65	100	34	1.65
3	Management / leadership style	54	60	100	36	1.51
4	Higher salary PS – other region	50	60	0	38	1.31
5	Lack of promotion	49	50	0	38	1.30
6	Lack challenge / variety	48	50	0 <sup>a</sup>	35	1.35
=7	Team work issues	47	50	0	34	1.40
=7	Lack of flexible work options	47	50	0	35	1.33
=8	Lack of prof. development	45	50	0	36	1.25
=8	Better employment ext. PS	45	35	0	40	1.12
9	Health issue	44	50	0	37	1.19
10	Location / physical environment	42	50	0	35	1.18
=11	Study / travel	38	25	0	38	1.02
=11	End of contract	38	12	0	43	0.87
=11	Insufficient remuneration	38	27	0	37	1.01
=12	Forced relocation	37	16	0	40	0.92
=12	Higher salary PS – metro	37	20	0	39	0.95
13	Work travel changed	29	20	0	30	0.97
14	Retirement	24	0	0	36	0.65

**(n = 91, 0<sup>a</sup> = multiple modes were obtained).**

This is supported by the high rate of respondents who have selected a one hundred percent score as indicated by the mode and is supported by the median of seventy. As this is an exploratory study, specific factors affecting job satisfaction were outside the scope of this research.

Family responsibility also rated highly, supporting the views provided in Chapter 4 by the interviewed respondents where families leave the regions due a variety of reasons, but predominately as a result off seeking improved educational facilities for children. Like job dissatisfaction, the standard deviation, provides a large distribution and when compared with the median and mode indicate that this impacts some respondents more than others. In



addition, the question did not provide a 'not applicable' option, resulting in the data having some potential unreliability. It is unknown how respondents who did not have family responsibilities answered this question.

Another common factor was "higher salary within the public sector in another region", which was consistent with the manager interviewees' observation that regional employees move between regions rather than return to the metropolitan area (Chapter 4). Further, "higher salary within the public sector – metropolitan" ranked equal twelfth, below "better employment external to the public sector" and "insufficient remuneration", supporting the notion that Perth was seen as a last resort: employees seeking better pay or conditions are more likely to leave the public sector and remain in the current or a new regional location. This will be further tested in the next section.

It is interesting to note that outside of the 'top five' reasons to leave, respondents ranked *work-based* reasons for leaving (ranks six to eight) higher than *personal* reasons (ranks nine to eleven). The least important reason was "retirement" which may be due to having only twenty-two percent of the sample over of fifty-five years old.

Twenty-two free-text responses were recorded, some of which were recorded as not applicable. Comments that provided additional information highlighted the lack of permanent employment options (four) and a lack of developmental opportunities or promotion in the region (six) which may be reflected in and support the fourth ranked item of seeking higher salaries in the public sector but in other regional locations. Family issues (four) were also recorded and provided additional clarity included the partner relocating, family needs and the children's education. Other common responses supported the third ranked item of "Management / Leadership style" which identified that (three) respondents were having problems with the manager or were experiencing bullying. It appears that these comments were provided by the respondents to

provide additional clarification to support their response to this previous question.

The free text options provided in the question on 'leadership skills that respondents would like to develop' previously identified in section 5.4 were not relevant to that section but do provide additional support and clarity to the factors listed here. The responses highlight the respondent's frustrations:

- Accessing training / development opportunities – availability of positions on courses and number of courses offered are limited,
- Career progression or development – lack of opportunity, lack of certainty due to too many secondment or acting arrangements,
- Business intelligence systems – up to date data to make better-informed rather than reactive decisions, and
- Understanding the complexities of funding and budget allocation – this is important to obtain sufficient funding to operate the services and is more than an ability to read financial reports.

Overall, it appears there is a high level of willingness to leave the respondent's current job. Two of the top issues were lack of job satisfaction and the management or leadership style, both cited by over fifty percent of respondents completing this section and over thirty percent of all respondents. Related issues mentioned by over forty percent include lack of challenge or variety and problems with teamwork. These are all issues that could be improved by better leadership, supporting the idea of leadership development as an important or even critical strategy for improving job satisfaction and performance as well as retention in regional WAPS offices. This could also help the forty-five percent of respondents who cited lack of development opportunities, and might even compensate for limitations in the salary, flexible work arrangements and other cited dissatisfactions.

### 5.6.2 Types of alternative employment sought

Further clues as to what might help retain regional employees came from asking what industries or types of employer's respondents would seek if they left their current job.

All 156 respondents answered this question. The higher response rate for this question, in comparison to the previous question, is likely due to those respondents that are engaged in transfer and posting arrangements now being able to provide a response that suited their employment arrangement. Table 5.16 summarises the results, as multiple responses were allowed, the totals below may not add to 100%.

**Table 5.16 Types of alternative employment sought – All respondents**

Rank	New employment option	Freq.	Percent
1	Public Sector – WA State Government	59	38
2	Public Sector – Commonwealth Government	31	20
3	Private Sector – Other Ind. type – current region	28	18
4	Self Employment	25	16
5	Public Sector – Other State Government	24	15
6	Public Sector – Local Government	21	13
7	Not looking for employment (maternity etc.)	14	9
8	Private Sector – Perth Based	10	6
=9	Private Sector – Mine, Man. Build. Con. – current region	9	6
=9	Private Sector – Other Industry type – other region	9	6
10	Australian Defence Forces	7	4
11	Private Sector – Mine, Man. Build. Con. – other region	5	3
12	Other (please specify)	4	3

(n = 156).

Respondents were overwhelmingly planning to remain in the WAPS, with employment in the Commonwealth Public Sector and interstate government agencies being appealing alternative options due to the “public sector industry”. This could also be reflective of the types of professions that respondents held which are widely associated with and sometime exclusive to the public sector.

Interestingly, private sector employment in the current region rated in third position, but was only a moderately popular alternative, indicating that respondents were more likely to remain in the region but leave the public sector, seeking alternative employment in other private sector industries unrelated to mining or construction. This could be representative of the respondent’s family circumstances and the partner holding the dominant career position.

Self-employment and respondents not seeking alternative employment were also moderately popular alternatives, which could be representative of the higher level of contract based positions. Local government also rated in this moderate level which is reflective of local government being a separate industry base to both Commonwealth and State government where there may be limited opportunity to alternate between the two industries due to the profession type.

Interestingly, working in local mining, manufacturing or building and construction jobs received only three percent of responses for working in another region, and when considered in the current region there was only a minor increase of a further three percent. It appears that leaving the public sector for these industries is no longer as popular as it was during the economic boom. It could also be a case that some employees have found that they can’t get a job outside of the public sector in these types of industries and therefore this is not a valid option for them. Employees were also less likely to leave the current region for another regional private sector role with only

three percent choosing this option. Returning to Perth and working in the private sector was also a low preference.

In summary, it appears that if respondents were to leave their current position, most would prefer an alternative WAPS position or to remain in the “public sector industry”. The alternative for eighteen percent of respondents was to remain in the region and engage in private sector employment. In viewing this with the previous section, aside from the job satisfaction issues, seeking better pay and conditions or a promotional opportunity are more likely to be the stimulants for an employee to leave the job and thus the region.

As indicated earlier in this section, WAPS employees are more likely to seek an alternative role in the public sector in another regional location or in the metropolitan area. This further supports the interviewee comments presented in Chapter 4, that WAPS employees are fluid between the regions within their profession and often move to seek the next promotional opportunity.

The alternative option for eighteen percent of respondents was to remain in the regional location and seek private employment. This is also promising as it might result in the person returning to the public sector, within the region, at some point in the future when a promotional opportunity arises. This further suggests the value of leadership development as a retention factor: few respondents were disaffected by the WAPS or the government environment generally, or saw ‘greener pastures’ in the private sector in regional WA.

### **5.6.3 Sources of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with work in the region**

A final perspective on retention and how leadership development might improve it came from asking respondents about nine aspects of work and life in their region. For each, a score between 0 (very dissatisfied) and 100 (very satisfied) was recorded. A total of eighty-nine respondents answered this question with the results displayed in Table 5.17.

**Table 5.17 Sources of satisfaction / dissatisfaction in the region – All respondents**

Rank	Source	$\mu$	Md.	Mo	$\sigma$	$\sigma$ from $\mu$
1	Recreation facilities sufficient	60	61	100	31	1.90
=2	Community services are adequate	59	60	100	29	2.02
=2	Access to technology and infrastructure is sufficient	59	62	51	27	2.14
3	Adequate support from direct line management	56	53	100	32	1.75
4	(If relevant) Opportunity to relocate to a new region	54	50	50	30	1.78
5	Housing / Accommodation options	52	51	0 <sup>a</sup>	33	1.59
6	Adequate support from senior management	50	50	50	29	1.74
7	Access to educational facilities is sufficient	49	51	0 <sup>a</sup>	31	1.58
8	(If relevant) Relocation to new region	47	50	50	31	1.52

**(n = 89, 0<sup>a</sup> = multiple modes were obtained).**

As can be seen, the ‘top three’ responses have higher than moderate levels of satisfaction with means above fifty-five percent. This is also supported by similar medians and despite the standard deviation also being high, the dispersion shows that most respondents are within, or close to two standard deviations. This means that ninety-five percent of respondents are within this range. The mode of one hundred also indicates that respondents chose this value most frequently, further supporting overall, respondents are satisfied with these factors in their region, with some sub-groups being more dissatisfied. As this study was exploratory in nature, only basic statistical analysis has been conducted to provide more indicative information. Further detailed statistical analysis of this data would be required to draw additional conclusions which is outside the main scope of this research.

The other interesting results to review are with housing and educational facilities with mixed results occurring for these sources. The “housing and accommodation” result is not surprising as housing quality is quite variable in regional WA, with forty-nine percent of respondents under the second quartile. The mean of fifty-two hides the significant groups of highly dissatisfied (almost 25%) and highly satisfied (20%) respondents.

This is replicated in the “access to educational facilities”, where forty-nine percent of respondents were under the second quartile. This larger dissatisfied group may explain the importance of “family responsibilities” as a trigger to leave the job (56% of respondents) noted above. The mean of forty-nine hides the significant groups of highly dissatisfied (over 20%) and highly satisfied (almost 25%) respondents.

The lower scores for “adequate support from senior management” and “adequate support from line manager” are consistent with the findings above, pointing to perceptions of poor management and a lack of leadership by a significant group of respondents. Leadership development is highly likely to help with the workplace issues, and some ‘spill over’ into lifestyle satisfaction might follow. Employers should also keep the non-work issues in mind when managing retention.

Sixty-seven respondents indicated “other” sources of satisfaction or dissatisfaction but curiously only five gave a free-text response. It is likely that the lack of responses was an error, in that they selected the “other” option by mistake and when the free text box appeared, did not enter a response or entered not applicable before moving on. The five responses covered the following issues:

- Insufficient social or community activities (two respondents);
- Inadequate support by line manager (one respondent);
- No regional airport (one respondent), and;

- Variation in allowances or salary packages between regions or state agencies (1 respondent).

This last point is in relation to the regional allowances and the salary package options that are available. Each government department has allowances and subsidies that are applicable to their employees and these differ across the government departments depending upon the award and department incentives. For example, health employees may be entitled to a regional travel allowance across the year, whereas police will be entitled to one return flight to Perth for the entire family per year. Other allowances and subsidies include air conditioning allowance, fuel, food and above the twenty-fifth parallel allowance.

## **5.7 Chapter Summary**

The sample demographics appear to be largely reflective of the regional WAPS workforce in employment level, management position, industry and age. For example, over half were from the health and human services sectors but these are large employers in the regions. Respondents tended to be older and better educated than is typical in the Australian workforce, but this is also representative of the public sector. Around two-thirds had previously worked in another region, which supports the participants comments in Chapter 4, of a mobile regional WAPS cohort.

When asked to identify the leadership skills required by regional leaders, respondents predominately chose soft skills such as communication, integrity, building relationships and managing conflict and negotiation. The next most important attributes represent general management competences - problem solving, decisiveness and relevant technical skills. The least important skills required of regional leaders were the general management competencies of reading reports, making sense of accounts, administration, organisation and recruiting staff.



The two most important skill sets identified here are consistent with the observations of the regional managers described in Chapter 4. Interpersonal skills are needed to create good working relationships: regional employees have closer social ties and value and team spirit more than their counterparts in metropolitan offices where interactions tend to be more formal, autonomous and confined to work hours. Interpersonal skills are also needed for interacting with or leading local community members, and often for socialising with staff outside work - issues not faced by metropolitan leaders. Secondly, regional leaders need the management skills for working across a wide range of areas, juggling resources, dealing with complexity and creatively solving problems for which metropolitan leaders could call on a wider range of human, financial and physical resources.

When asked what skills *they* would like to develop, respondents (that were not necessarily in leadership positions) highlighted skills for managing conflict, negotiation, maintaining personal wellness and work-life balance, communication and developing other staff, consistent with their views of the skills needed by regional leaders. Interestingly, wellness and work-life balance were not singled out in the former answers, but significant challenges to the psychological well-being of regional employees were identified by the managers interviewed (Chapter 4, see also Chapter 6). The other common skill sought by respondents was innovation, consistent with the 'flexible management' competences noted above.

A third area of the survey involved the nature of a potential regional leadership program. Two-thirds of respondents answered this section, suggesting considerable interest in developing their leadership skills. Workshops, coaching, mentoring, networking and project work were similarly common answers, with mentoring and job shadowing somewhat less common and travel to Perth a quite unpopular option. The most popular format for formal development was a long-term program (over six to twelve months) of half day

or entire day sessions but a three to five day intensive program was also popular. These represent different solutions to problems regional staff face in getting away from a broad set of often-unpredictable daily job requirements, and for some also having to travel to regional centres. Leadership development in regional centres must address logistical problems that may be less severe in metropolitan offices.

The fourth topic concerned factors that might potentially influence respondents to leave their job. Two of the three top sources of dissatisfaction were job dissatisfaction and management style, issues that can be related to a lack of workplace leadership skills. Opportunities to increase their salary were also concerns but other mid-ranking issues involved the work climate: a lack of challenge or variety in the work, teamwork and professional development opportunity, suggesting a lack of attention to the psychological dimensions of work in regional offices that leadership development programs could address. "Family responsibilities" was in the top three non-work issues, and other personal issues to do with health, the location or physical environment and study or travel opportunities in the regional setting were moderately significant but less so than the work-related issues.

Overall, this set of findings highlights the value of leadership development to regional WAPS offices. While not a panacea, it could address significant concerns with the workplace climate and job satisfaction that may cause staff to leave their current position.

A final question asked respondents directly about work and life in their region, with nine items being rated as sources of satisfaction or dissatisfaction. The lifestyle factors were more likely to be sources of satisfaction than dissatisfaction, but for all items there were significant groups of dissatisfied respondents. Most relevant here is that lack of support from senior managers and line managers was a concern and could be a significant cause of dissatisfaction with work and life in the region. Work-related problems have

additional significance for employees in small or isolated communities. Leadership development could assist to address many of these issues, and can therefore improve the attractiveness of regional areas to WAPS employees. These issues are further discussed in Chapter 6.

## **CHAPTER 6 DISCUSSION**

### **6.1 Introduction**

This study aimed to examine the possible role of a leadership development program in addressing WAPS retention in regional locations. Chapter 4 described findings from interviews with nine public sector managers holding SES or aspirant leader roles (participants), who did not see retention improving substantially through the offer of a leadership development program but saw other advantages in such programs, including attraction of talented employees, helping existing and new staff to adjust to the unique aspects of working and living in regional centres, and up-skilling existing staff to improve their job satisfaction and career prospects. Chapter 5 presented the results of a survey of 156 employees including those as SES or aspirant leaders (respondents). Like the participants, these respondents emphasised the serious lack of development opportunities in regional locations and thought that a LDP is an important strategy to address some of the issues facing regional locations, benefiting both the agency and the wider community. Respondents identified the skills necessary for a regional leader and those they wanted to develop in themselves.

This chapter compares and integrates the interview findings and survey in relation to the four main research questions concerning: (i) the differences between leadership in regional and metropolitan areas, (ii) the skills required of a regional leader, (iii) the potential content and delivery methods of a regional LDP, and (iv) the factors affecting retention in regional offices and the value of a leadership program in improving it.

In the coming sections, the interview and survey findings in relation to each main research question are combined, linking the various bodies of literature to the overall findings. The bodies of literature on leadership theory and

Australian regional cultures are linked to research questions one and two, whilst the theory on leadership development links to research question three. Research question four is reviewed in relation to the factors affecting retention in the regions which links to the literature on retention. Finally, a summary of the chapter is provided linking SHRM literature and the development of leadership to the potential outcomes a regional LDP may have if implemented in the regions.

## **6.2 The difference between leadership in metropolitan and regional settings**

Research question one was addressed only by the interviews with participants, as it sought to identify the differences between the leadership skills required in regional offices compared to those of metropolitan leaders. It also sought to seek out the challenges faced by the participants which were exclusive to working in the regions. The survey did not include questions related to this research question as respondents were not expected to necessarily have work experience in Perth and it is unlikely that respondents would have the necessary insight into the roles performed by regional and metropolitan leaders, thus being unable to identify any differences between the roles.

An interesting perspective on regional leadership was that all participants felt that they needed primarily the same core leadership skills as metropolitan leaders, however the application of those skills required a differing emphasis (referred to as special attributes in this research), indicating that a regional leader was required to have greater flexibility and capability in changing their leadership style to suit the situation or circumstance of the matters faced. The breadth of the role that regional leaders were required to perform due to smaller offices and engagement with a wide range of stakeholders resulted in regional leaders performing a more 'all-rounder' leadership role. As such, participants identified that an effective regional leader could transfer to a metropolitan role without requiring development, however an effective

metropolitan leader would need additional development to understand the challenges faced in the regions such as the breadth and depth of the role, the level of community involvement and the psychological challenges unique to the regions.

Participants saw differences in both work roles and living conditions of regional staff. They unanimously pointed to the greater breadth and depth of work roles and the greater autonomy of staff in smaller, less well-resourced offices, which required them to have a broader range of business skills, greater flexibility and resilience. Difficulties in recruiting staff exacerbated this, requiring more versatility and tolerance when positions were not filled, or existing staff were often less capable than equivalents in Perth Offices. New recruits into regions were seen to require more on-the-job development and staff generally felt obliged to 'help out'.

A second work-related difference was greater involvement with the local community in regional offices, requiring staff to develop an understanding of local socio-cultural norms and values, and to spend time getting to know community members. This included much higher levels of collaboration with other WAPS agencies, than metropolitan counterparts, whereby the regional heads of agencies met on a frequent basis to address local and social issues. A LDP developed specifically for the regions would provide an opportunity for those occupying or about to occupy regional manager roles to establish a regional network with other WAPS employees. A LDP may also enable a greater understanding of the community culture, the pressing needs facing the community and the expectations of the wider community in accessing the public services offered by the agency.

Regional jobs also brought the psychological challenges of living in a small community where work contacts, whether colleagues or community members, were regularly encountered outside work and may also be key members of an employee's social world. Managing the boundary between work and social

roles was not always easy; value conflicts were common, and employees were 'on show' as agency representatives whenever in public. There was also a common expectation that agency leaders would also be community leaders (Harley et al., 2014). Regional employees were also contacted while on leave or outside of the office hours by members of the public seeking the public service. Employees could feel harassed by dissatisfied community members, and their family were also in the public spotlight. These were identified as providing psychological challenges for those in regional areas which all were not commonly encountered by metropolitan workers. Psychological researchers have found a highly 'permeable' work-life boundary can be a significant source of stress (Dockery & Bawa, 2014; Kossek, Kalliath, & Kalliath, 2012; Singh, 2016; Sullivan, 2012).

At the same time, the participants recognised that working in a regional office could be a source of greater job satisfaction than in a city office, given the opportunities for task variety, teamwork, community engagement and changing positions. Making a difference in the local community was also seen as having the capacity to further increase job satisfaction. This finding links directly to the organisational behaviour and job design literature which shows the importance of task and skill variety and meaningfulness (Gordon & Lowe, 2002), intrinsic work satisfaction (Mitchell et al., 2001), team-based work, and organisational commitment to employee engagement (Roche et al., 2015; Samad et al., 2015) and psychological well-being (Kossek et al., 2012; Singh, 2016).

From the participant's perspective, the challenge is therefore to attract staff who can cope with the special challenges of regional work and enjoy the rewards that come with it. Both recruitment and retention depend on either finding such employees or developing in them relevant skills and attitudes once they are in the organisation. Participants identified that employees were often unprepared for living in the regions due to the harsh climatic conditions, the isolation, local 'ocker' culture and high visibility in the community.

The introduction of an outbound training program, to prepare prospective employees entering the regions may assist with limiting the culture shock for these employees. This would be further enhanced by an induction to the town on arrival in the regional location, whereby local prominent community leaders were met, available infrastructure identified and a brief outline of the “way things are done around here” is included. In considering the content of a region specific LDP, value may be gained by including cultural components such as an awareness session, highlighting these factors as issues affecting attraction and retention for those considering regional employment.

In summary, participants identified that whilst the leadership capability was predominately the same for metropolitan and regional leaders, there were special attributes of leadership that resulted in differences between the application of leadership styles, where increased flexibility in the application of styles is required in the regions, to interact with the varying stakeholders and situations that were encountered resulted in the leader being an ‘all-rounder’ leader. This provides an early indication that there may be varying layers to leadership in the WAPS between the metropolitan and regional areas with a specific regional emphasis. These will become more evident in the preceding sections.

### **6.3 Leadership capabilities required in regional offices**

Research question two concerning the capabilities required by regional leaders was addressed by data from three sources, the interviews with participants and two questions put to respondents in the survey, one about skills needed by regional leaders and one about their own skills development. The responses in each of the three sources showed good overlap but also some differences, and all three addressed both core leadership skills and items unique to regional settings since the questions allowed both types of answer.



This section is divided into two parts. The first provides the perceptions of all respondents from the survey, responses which provide a more expansive view of leadership skills required in the regions. The second part is more detailed providing the views of the participants on the leadership capabilities required and combines these perceptions with the survey results from the self-identified leaders group. This group has been selected over the aspirant level 6+ group as the self-identified leaders group is reflective of the participants. As the second part is the main body of this section, the leadership literature will be incorporated to prevent repetition through the section.

### **6.3.1 Leadership capabilities from the view of all respondents**

A brief overview of the main findings from all surveyed respondents on the leadership skills required in the regions and those that respondents would like to develop further, is detailed below.

The top ten qualities identified by all respondents were largely consistent with classical theories of trait, behavioural, situational and transformational leadership and are displayed in order of the “most important” skills required (Appendix 3):

1. Communication skills;
2. Integrity in decision making;
3. Building relationships;
4. Taking action and following through on decisions;
5. Problem solving;
6. Developing staff;
7. Managing conflict and negotiation skills;
8. Administration and organisation competencies;
9. Knowledge of the local area and culture, and;
10. Innovation.

Interestingly, several respondents, suggested that different situations would require different skills. This view is consistent with contingency and situational leadership theories in which the approach is dictated by the leader-follower relationship and aspects of the context such as the focus on tasks versus relationships or the maturity and readiness of followers (Blanchard et al., 1985; Dubrin et al., 2006; Northouse, 2016).

When asked in the survey about their own skills development needs, respondent's top ten responses showed greatest focus on managing conflict, personal wellbeing and innovation, and on technical issues of managing finances and human resources. The below list from all respondents highlights the top ten skills that are 'most important' for skill development in the regions (Appendix 4):

1. Managing conflict and negotiation skills;
2. Maintaining wellness / work-life balance;
3. Innovation;
4. Developing staff;
5. Communication skills;
6. Goal setting and time management;
7. Making sense of reports and accounts;
8. Building relationships;
9. Taking action and following through on decisions, and;
10. Recruiting people.

The number of managerial tasked based skills in this list (the last 5 items) is not surprising as many respondents were not in high-level positions. The identification of the leadership skills that regional WAPS employees would like to develop to improve capability is an important finding in this research, regardless if some are identified as predominately management based skills. As most WAPS agencies have a performance management system in place, which includes a professional development planning (PDP) section, this insight

should enable those guiding employees in the development of these PDPs to better direct development needs.

A concentrated effort toward PDPs could also change the strategic focus of this human resource practice from the perception of a “have to do” compliance aspect, toward an emphasis that provides greater self-awareness for the continuing development of the employee (Tovey & Lawlor, 2004). This approach would place the individual onto the pathway of leadership development, engaging the WAPS employee in the first steps of developing individualised leadership through increasing self-leadership and self-management (Baban, 2015; Bradley et al., 2017; Dippenaar & Schaap, 2017; Dubrin et al., 2006; Parry, 1998).

### **6.3.2 Leadership capabilities from the view of self-identified leaders**

As has been identified in section 6.2, participants felt strongly that metropolitan leaders would need to develop additional skills to succeed in a regional role, a summary of those views is that (i) regional leaders need the same core leadership skills as metropolitan counterparts (those found in conventional leadership theories and development programs), (ii) regional leaders needed a broader set of management based competencies, and (iii) some skills or competencies, the special attributes, needed by regional leaders are typically not required in their metropolitan counterparts.

The next discussion turns the focus to the leadership capabilities required of regional leaders and is organised according to the themes identified by participants in Section 4.3. Participants were asked directly about regional leadership skills and given no predefined responses, therefore giving the most relevant answers. Survey responses addressing these themes are included for each special attribute, from the respondents who were self-identified leaders. The broad implications for the core leadership skills are discussed first, followed by the regional specific ‘special attribute’ skill set, the latter being of most interest to this research question. The list of identified leadership skills

and management based competencies are collated to form a regional WAPS leader capability profile which is presented later in the discussion.

Interestingly, the participants appeared not to have given the leadership skills required of a regional leader much conscious attention, and had some difficulty describing them. Responses tended to be operationally focussed rather than addressing leadership capability itself, suggesting 'regional leadership skills' is an unfamiliar concept for the participants and there is a cross over in their minds between leadership and management. This is not uncommon and is discussed extensively in the literature (Baban, 2015, Dubrin et al, 2006, Dubrin, 2003, Bradley et al, 2017).

Analysis of their more pragmatic views on the problems and challenges facing regional leaders did, however, suggest the following themes, which identified the core leadership skills, management based competencies and special attributes required of a regional leader:

- Core leadership skills and management based competencies;
- Networking and building relationships with community members;
- A breadth of skills and knowledge;
- Flexibility and resilience;
- Creative thinking;
- Managing with limited resources, and;
- Community leadership.

Each of these themes will now be discussed in greater detail to provide an overall picture of the leadership skills required of a regional leader.

### **Core leadership skills and management based competencies**

In the ensuing discussion, participants identified several capabilities that were relevant to both metropolitan and regional WAPS leaders, identified as the core skills:

- Shaping the strategic direction of the organisation;
- Achieving results;
- Building productive relationships;
- Exemplifying personal integrity and self-awareness, and;
- Communicating and influencing effectively.

Shaping the strategic direction can be described as the development of a strategic direction which is aligned with the whole of government agenda. In reviewing the various leadership theories, it appears that this core leadership skill aligns with transformational leadership which is characterised by a relationship between the group whereby a sense of evoking the status quo toward a greater purpose is achieved (Day & Antonakis, 2012; Dubrin et al., 2006). It includes a stimulation of the morals and values of followers toward self fulfillment and adopting a long term broad perspective of high level goals (Dubrin et al., 2006). The creation of a vision is a focal point for transformational leadership (Northouse, 2016), and by developing the strategic direction aligned with the government agenda provides the organisation with this vision.

Achieving results included consideration of alternative approaches on the deployment of resources and included incorporating technology, professional expertise and development of a strong culture of achievement that was compliant with regulatory requirements. Again, this core skill can be linked to transformational leadership in this case the leader influences the followers toward goal achievement (Northouse, 2016), and components of authentic leadership where the interpersonal aspects of the relationship with followers is utilised (Northouse, 2016). Here the leader needs to obtain buy-in from followers (Northouse, 2016), and success occurs once followers identify with the concept, engagement with followers and determination toward achievement are qualities to look for in this leadership style (Smith, 2015). Situational leadership also melds with achieving results as this model matches

the commitment and competence of the follower in completing the task at hand and the leader alters their style to suit this grading (Blanchard et al., 1985).

Building productive relationships included both internal and external stakeholders and extended to the development of staff. This leadership skill is covered in many leadership theories as it is at the core of influencing and empowering others. In trait theory, it could be the “gift” the leader has, to inspire (Dubrin et al., 2006), whereas in the styles approach it could be the use of one of the five leadership styles depending on the relationship status (Northouse, 2016), alternatively the path-goal theory would identify this as the style the leader adopts to enhance the follower’s motivation (Dubrin et al., 2006). Building relationships is one of the cross-over points to the field of psychology identified in the wider research (Northouse, 2016).

Exemplifying personal integrity and self-awareness focussed on role modelling professionalism, living the WAPS values and acting in accordance with the Code of Conduct. Three main theories relate to this identified leadership skill; transformational, authentic and ethical leadership. In transformational theory, the ethical awareness of the leader has been identified as the major criticism of the theory as it has been identified that the leader could abuse their position and manipulate the vision toward unethical outcomes (Johnson, 2009).

Authentic leadership may be more applicable for this skill, as this theory concentrates on the intrapersonal aspects (self-regulation, self-knowledge, self-concept) the development aspect (nurturing traits over the lifetime with a balanced moral perspective) and interpersonal (reciprocal interactions they have with followers where the above self values are espoused by the leader) (Northouse, 2016). Ethical leadership on the other hand considers a more global focus of intercultural awareness, good citizenship and community engagement where decisions are made not only for the benefit of the organisation but also considers the impact of the decision on environmental sustainability and other moral concepts (Johnson, 2009). Managing follower’s

ethical behaviour is as important as the leader managing their own morals (Johnson, 2009).

Finally, communicating and influencing, incorporated themes such as listening carefully to the audience, presenting messages concisely and in a clear manner; and presenting a clear rationale. Like the building relationships skill, this core skill can be identified in most modern leadership theories and does not need further explanation.

In support of these core leadership skills, the self-identified leader survey respondents were provided with a predetermined list of leadership skills to select and rank. It is not surprising to see that most of these core leadership skills are reflected in the top five 'most important' skills identified below (Appendix 3):

1. Communication skills;
2. Building relationships;
3. Integrity in decision making;
4. Problem solving;
5. Taking action and following through on decisions;
6. Developing staff;
7. Managing conflict and negotiation skills;
8. Recruiting people;
9. Goal setting and time management, and;
10. Innovation.

The participants responses combined with the self-identified leader responses provide a detailed list of core leadership skills for the WAPS leaders. Like the responses found from all survey respondents, results of those respondents that were self-identified leaders, highlight the importance of the top five leadership skills in the 'most important' category with communication, building relationships, integrity in decision making, problem solving and taking action

and following through on decisions all identified in both groups. The list of core skills identified by participants and respondents is reflective of the wider literature on leadership theories. This draws the research toward the leadership skills that have been identified as the special attributes of a regional leader, which is discussed below.

### **Networking and building relationships with community members**

Both the participants and survey respondents thought regional leaders would be more engaged with their local community than metropolitan equivalents, perhaps because of their regular interactions with other community leaders. However, employees at lower levels also must work closely with members of the public, and generally live in the local community. As leaders, regardless of the employment level, WAPS employees need to understand the various local sub-cultures (Wildy et al., 2010), and the specific challenges faced by community members through developing working relationships with grass-roots members and, for more senior leaders, participating in high-level business, community and government networks.

Leaders at all levels of regional agencies are often widely recognised by community members and come to represent the agency's public face. Their deep knowledge of regional social life and 'how things work' may make them community leaders, and they may also need to network with other government, non-profit and community leaders (Wildy et al., 2010). Success in this means letting others know them personally, consistent with the relationship-centred ('mateship') values of Australian regional cultures (Ashkanasy & Falkus, 1998; Crews, 2015). The importance of communication skills, relationship building, managing conflicts, negotiation and integrity in the survey responses may in part reflect this need for community networking.

However, community engagement capabilities go well beyond these networking, influencing and cultural awareness abilities. Leaders will find themselves in the public spotlight, under scrutiny regarding their personal



behaviour and integrity as well as their agency's image (Wildy et al., 2010). They face conflicts where the answers involve competing values, (Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1983), that cannot be simply resolved through prescriptive frameworks, calling for a strong sense of ethics and an authentic approach to leadership (Johnson, 2009).

The regional leader must manage these four quadrants: rational goals (productivity and performance of the agency objectives), internal process (efficiency of processes and evaluation of agency goal achievement), open systems (supporting the community through effective resource management) and human relations (effective relationships) to maintain effectiveness (Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1983). The weight against each of these quadrants differs depending upon the role the leader is attempting to perform, with effectiveness achieved by managing these varying conflicts when required (Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1983). In practice, this involves the leader being responsible for the ethical behaviour of others in the team and promoting the ethical decisions of others in addition to their own moral behaviour, as seen in the authentic theory and ethical theory of leadership (Johnson, 2009; Northouse, 2016).

As well, both participants and survey respondents saw their work-life balance and boundaries challenged by having a social life involving locals with whom they may also have working relationships with, and generally being visible to community members in public places. Dockery and Bawa (2014), found that the commute between work and home enabled the boundaries of life and work to be separated and reduces the transfer of stress from one domain to the other. In regional settings where the commute is negligible and is compounded by the regular social interaction between the workplace and these social settings, stronger work-life conflicts or pressures are produced. This makes the psychological disengagement from work more difficult (Dockery & Bawa, 2014).

This visibility can bring further problems when things are not going well for the leader and the community questions their decisions and judges the leader. This could lead to the “tall poppy syndrome” whereby community members criticize or denigrate leaders (Feather, 1989, 1994), as reported in this research by Talisa *“The community is not shy in saying things on Facebook, which means you need to be self-aware, as they know what you do, where you go and what you say”*. Even in normal times, leaders may be criticised in public for agency decisions disliked by individuals or groups, as identified by Sansa *“You are judged fairly harshly when you first start, and they [the local community leaders] are pretty influential in the community - you have to earn your stripes”*.

A third aspect of leadership in regional communities is being exposed to the personal lives of staff, perhaps increasing the “mateship” component (Ashkanasy & Falkus, 1998), but also bringing the risk of role-conflict (e.g. manager vs friend) and the need to maintain work-life boundaries.

Overall, these challenges to social relationships, values and ethics, and personal wellbeing could cause significant stress if not skilfully managed, suggesting important themes for leadership development including: building relationships, dealing with conflict and setting boundaries. Although common topics in LDPs and available through external LDP providers, for example the Australian Institute of Management (AIM) WA and the Australian Rural Leadership Foundation (Allen et al., 1997), these were suggested by participants, so take on special importance in the regional context.

### **A breadth of skills and knowledge**

The second most important difference to metropolitan leadership is the need for regional leaders to be a “jack of all trades” – a generalist. For example, participants highlighted that since regional offices lacked the array of specialists available in Perth, regional managers need broad knowledge and skills toward government operations, including:

- systems and processes;
- occupational health and safety;
- budgeting and funding;
- project management;
- risk management;
- managing staff, performance management, staff development, and;
- governance requirements.

This knowledge or skill development is typically covered in management development programs, including occupational health and safety, budgeting, project management, performance management and organisational culture programs. Regional managers should have access to these through a range of options with some departments providing internal training either locally or from Perth. Alternatives include certificate level courses provided by local regional training providers, online courses or the Tertiary and Further Education (TAFE) sector.

Although ‘a broad range of skills’ was not provided as a response in the survey questionnaire, the abilities identified by the self-identified leader respondents did cover a broad range, including the leadership skills of communication, building relationships and integrity as the top three items for ‘most important’ leadership skills. Reviewing the mid-ranked items of the ‘most important skills’ highlights that management based skills were also considered relevant with developing staff, recruiting people and goal setting and time management selected.

A primary conclusion of this study is that a regional leaders’ ability to juggle complex issues across multiple domains is an important distinction between regional leaders and the metropolitan equivalents. As a consequence, regional WAPS leaders need the physical and emotional toughness, flexibility and self-reliance often seen as typical of Australians in regional areas – an “all-rounder” leadership style. Pini (2003), identified that the Australian leadership culture

of heroism, the adversarial management approach and self-reliance was linked to the nation's historical upbringing of being both a convict and frontier settlement. This resulted in leaders needing to have an understanding on 'industry based' issues but also a need to understand a wide range of activities from marketing, economic development, world trends and the 'bigger picture' of how these all interrelate and impact the local community.

A second aspect of being an all-rounder is the need to rely on and work with others; skills for creating cooperative relationships with a wide range of employees were seen as more important in regional leaders than metropolitan leaders. The former has to work more closely with staff above and below their substantive position, and fill short-term vacancies across levels. Feather (1994), in research on the Australian 'tall poppy', identified that although the success of the leader is valued, there is a view that the leader should not be too different and too successful or above average of other team members. The leader therefore needs to call on others' specific knowledge and capabilities, and recognise when to take a more dominant or less dominant approach than normal (Collard, 2007; Davis, 2014). In other words, regional managers need to be able to adjust their leadership style to suit the situation or circumstances more often than their city equivalents.

As a result, regional WAPS offices tend to have a lower power-distance culture than metropolitan ones, reinforcing the values of cooperation and 'mateship' common in Australian regional cultures (Casimir & Waldman, 2007). Work relationships are typically more egalitarian, less formal and more consultative or team-based than in cities (Collard, 2007; Parry & Sarros, 1996). Leaders need to utilise social skills as much as management skills to devise innovative solutions to problems. It is important to acknowledge that the soft skills of leading (Brown & Bourke, 2017), – the communication, relationship building, and conflict and negotiation skills – are largely learned through experience (Collard, 2007; Wang, 2004). Leadership development cannot focus solely on conceptual knowledge but must build on work experience. Coaching and

mentoring can be valuable ways of facilitating learning from such experiences (Davis, 2014; Dippenaar & Schaap, 2017; Dubrin et al., 2006; McKenzie, 2001).

### **Flexibility and resilience**

The participants highlighted the need for high levels of flexibility and resilience in regional leaders and self-identified leader survey respondents highlighted that wellness and work-life balance, as self-development needs were also important, so may have also had resilience in mind when rating these skills.

Participants saw flexibility and resilience as important skills, due the breadth of problems faced by regional managers, but also due to many other aspects of their work environment. One environment aspect is that in some areas leaders need to work with a local culture dominated by older males whose direct language and traditional Australian outback or country values prioritise emotional toughness, self-reliance and antagonism towards authority, especially governments (Pini, 2003).

Flexibility and resilience were also important in dealing with internal staffing and performance issues. Leaders needed to recognise the effects of isolation and work-life balance challenges (Carson et al., 2010), on employee's mental wellbeing and their limited access to basic health and housing services (Shean, 2010b).

Thirdly, as a general mental attitude, flexibility was necessary when implementing head office policies and finding creative solutions to problems, for example by juggling resources. Travel away from the office could be scheduled to incorporate multiple tasks over a longer timeframe, perhaps combining personal needs such as leave with work requirements, for example the remote employee may return to the regional office for a personal development day. To maximise the trip the employee may also take medical samples to be processed and return equipment that needs servicing. Whilst

at the regional centre the employee could attend to personal appointments such as the dentist or hairdresser accessing these services that are not available in the remote location for the few hours that are required. Before returning home, they would collect replacement supplies, test results and the serviced equipment.

Finally, other issues that make flexibility and resilience key skills for regional WAPS employees incorporate the problems of living in regional communities, such as limited health, education, recreational and social opportunities, isolation, poor housing and climate, and managing work-life boundaries, conflicts and personal wellbeing. Although not a simple task, flexibility and resilience can be developed by well-designed development programs, for example, AIM's "Think Smart 2017" course (Dippenaar & Schaap, 2017; Luthans, Avolio, Avey, & Norman, 2007). These criteria of resilience, flexibility, self-efficacy and hope when combined become a higher order construct, termed psychological capital or PsyCap and can be developed (Luthans et al., 2007). Given the importance of work-life issues this will now be further discussed.

'Work-life balance and wellness' was the second most important area of self-development for all surveyed respondents, and participants often raised this issue. Work-life balance and wellness in workplaces has been widely studied in the academic literature and evidence suggests long working hours, work pressure and lack of boundaries can lead to serious psychological and physical harm, including burnout and life-threatening diseases (Dockery & Bawa, 2014). Overwork and time pressures also reduce the efficiency and quality of work (Dockery & Bawa, 2014; Kossek et al., 2012).

This, is therefore a vital topic for future LDPs. Development should highlight the complexity of roles regional leaders face, often changing between management and leadership roles (as well as subordinate and follower roles) in the workplace and in life outside as an individual, family member, community

member and possibly a community leader. Role conflict, setting boundaries and time management are key topics to be included in the LDP.

Managing personal wellbeing is also important given the isolation of regional staff from friends and family, and the lifestyle and climate drawbacks often associated with these localities. Staff new to a region may especially benefit from managing personal wellbeing, whereas existing staff may better deal with these challenges when undertaking leadership roles in the future.

### **Creative thinking**

Creative thinking was a key theme for the participants, while survey respondents rated problem solving the third most important skill in a regional leader. Survey respondents also rated innovation as their third highest developmental priority.

Participants saw thinking outside the box necessary as conventional methods and procedures used in metropolitan areas were often ineffective with the smaller workforces and limited budgets of regional offices. New leaders needed to learn how to develop practical solutions to complex problems in all aspects of the agency's operations – staffing, budget allocation, infrastructure, travel and communications over a distance, dealing with community expectations and needs, and maintaining relationships with other agencies or head office. As one example, social and environmental problems were often best addressed when multiple agencies worked together to create a joint solution.

Creativity, innovation and problem solving skills can be facilitated through formal programs, such as the AIM's "Think Smart 2017" course which provides participants with an understanding of how their brain works and ways in which to improve productivity and creative thinking. These skills however are not easily taught and once the underlying knowledge is gained, competency is best achieved through trial and error and learning from real world problems

(Bradley et al., 2017; Collard, 2007; Davis, 2014). As public service cultures tend to be risk-averse in many ways (Aijala, 2001; Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development, 2009), employees may need to be encouraged to think laterally (within the limits of ethics and governance requirements) through coaching or mentoring by experienced leaders.

### **Managing with limited resources**

Managing limited resources was a common theme in the interviews, but wasn't specifically listed in the predetermined survey responses. It can be addressed in a LDP primarily in terms of the design of the LDP when project working groups are included whereby skills such as 'flexibility and resilience', and 'creativity, innovation and problem solving' are practiced and refined. Goal setting and time management skills development can also help.

### **Community leadership**

An important focus of any regional LDP is the local context, including local cultures and social norms. Davies (2007) found community leaders trained in business disciplines alone were not able to operate effectively without access to regional communities and social networks. Cultural awareness training can reduce "culture shock" for staff new to the region and help those already living there connect with groups and individuals outside their normal circles. Survey respondents identified local knowledge as the ninth most important quality of regional leaders, and it was commonly mentioned by the participants.

Community leadership was identified by participants as a key activity for regional WAPS leaders (Harley et al., 2014). This exposes the leader to a range of complex issues, most predominate being the integrity and ethics of decisions. Integrity was the third most desirable quality of the self-identified leader respondents in the survey results, and the participants emphasised the importance of accountability, transparency and trust in regional leaders.



While integrity is important in all leaders (Northouse, 2016), many aspects of regional work and life invite value conflicts or ethical dilemmas, for example working and living in the same community, being an agency and community leader, perhaps having family members working in the same agency or other agencies, exercising flexibility and creativity, managing across a broad range of areas, and having to juggle resources. A leader may be under pressure to accept a community or a particular group's expectations, and may need to question whether personal biases, stereotyping, discrimination or cultural values affect his or her judgements. For example, the values of 'mateship', egalitarian or community 'solidarity' and so on can also blind a leader to the issues faced by individuals considered outsiders by a community.

To local community members, the integrity of public officials also includes their fairness and concern for the real needs of the local community. Three participants noticed that their community assessed new leaders for their fit with community values immediately upon arrival, often through encounters outside the workplace. The results of this 'suitability test' spread quickly through the 'bush telegraph'. Such concerns are not particular to regions, today the public in general expects greater transparency, accountability and compassion from leaders (Davis, 2014; Moolenburgh, 2015; Smith, 2015).

Integrity therefore poses complex challenges to public agency leaders in regional communities (Crews, 2015; Parry & Sarros, 1996), and should be part of a holistic LDP. Like, creativity and resilience, integrity is not easily taught but the literature on ethical leadership has increasingly focussed on addressing it in executive development programs (Davis, 2014).

Ethical problems often involve value conflicts or dilemmas, and 'managing conflict and negotiation' was the most important skill all respondents wanted to develop in themselves. Value conflicts can arise in everyday settings: for example, a manager may unintentionally disclose confidential information while socialising with community members after a difficult day at work. Family

members may also need to keep information confidential, and conflicts of interest can arise from giving personal favours or preferential treatment to community members. A second example is where close working relationships between employees and leaders lead to difficulties in managing employee's performance and expectations about involvement in decision-making.

Integrity can be addressed in LDPs through discussion of ethical frameworks and theories of moral development, values clarification exercises and case studies of ethical dilemmas, for example Leadership WA's program includes a subject titled "Values are the anchor" and AIM's program incorporates a subject titled "Leading Self" which highlights the self-actualisation and the perceptions that are carried by the individual may affect the decisions made.

### **Regional leader capability profile**

The three sets of results provided by the participants, all respondents in the survey and the self-identified respondents can be collated to provide a broad view for a regional leader capability profile. This profile comprises the core leadership skills required of WAPS leaders, includes certain management based competencies and incorporates the special attributes required in regional contexts, as shown in Table 6.1. While the boundaries between leadership and management, skills and competencies and 'core' and 'special' skills are to some extent subjective and findings depend on the questions asked and responses available, Table 6.1 should help WAPS leaders and future researchers conceptualise the skills needed by leaders in regional contexts. The practitioner implications of this study may include consideration of the development of a regional leader capability framework from the findings of this study.

Table 6.1 Regional leader capability profile

Management competencies	Leadership skills
<p>Goal setting &amp; time management</p> <p>Administration &amp; organisation skills</p> <p>Making sense of reports &amp; accounts</p> <p>Taking action, following through on decisions</p> <p>Developing staff</p> <p>Recruiting staff</p> <p>Selecting the right person for a project</p> <p>Occupational health and safety</p> <p>Financial management</p> <p>Performance management</p> <p>Public sector practices &amp; policies</p>	<p>Broad leadership skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ‘All rounder’ leadership</li> <li>• Interpersonal skills</li> </ul> <p>Community relationships &amp; leadership</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building community relationships</li> <li>• Dealing with conflict</li> <li>• Setting boundaries</li> </ul> <p>Flexibility &amp; resilience</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-reliance</li> <li>• Self-awareness</li> <li>• Self-leadership</li> <li>• Work-life balance</li> <li>• Helping staff develop these qualities</li> </ul> <p>Creativity &amp; innovation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thinking outside the box</li> <li>• Innovation in methods and systems</li> <li>• Problem-solving skills</li> </ul> <p>Integrity &amp; ethics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working &amp; living in a small community</li> <li>• Values &amp; managing value conflicts</li> </ul> <p>Managing with limited resources</p> <p>Knowledge of local area &amp; cultures</p>

In reviewing the mix of skills listed in Table 6.1, the researcher has identified that regional leaders need a complex mix of technical, human and conceptual skills where the regional leader is required to be flexible to alter their leadership style and approach to a given situation or matter that they are faced with. For the regional leader, it is surmised that the ratios for these three skill categories would be equal with perhaps a stronger influence on technical skills due to the broader roles that a regional leader is exposed to. The flexibility of the regional leader would be in shifting the balance between these skills categories to suit the scenario.

In comparison it is surmised that a metropolitan leader would have equal ratios for the human and conceptual skills with less focus on the technical skills due to the availability of specialist managers in the metropolitan area. The metropolitan leader would therefore have less diversity of skills across these technical areas.

### **6.3.3 Summary**

Research question 2 asked what skills regional leaders needed in order to address the challenges of working and living in regional areas. Different but overlapping answers came from participants and surveyed respondents. The differences reflected both the nature of each research method – open-ended semi-structured questioning versus sorting or rating predetermined responses – and the different outlooks of participants and respondents. Other differences were encountered in asking all respondents what attributes regional leaders should have, and which they would like to develop in themselves. Respondents cited not only leadership skills but also management competencies. The discussion above has focused on leadership skills unique to regional managers and employees.

Comparing the different responses and viewpoints resulted in a list of core leadership skills, management based competencies and special requirements for regional leaders shown in Table 6.1, which provide a capability profile for a

regional leader. Based on this, it is recommended that the skills that should be developed for a regional leader include the following topics: becoming an “all-rounder” leader; building relationships with community members, and community leadership; flexibility and resilience; creative thinking and innovation; integrity and ethics; managing with limited resources; and knowledge of the local area and culture.

The core and special attributes identified in the collected data are in most cases cited or implied in theories of leadership such as the traits, behaviour, situational leadership and recent transformational and authentic leadership theories (Northouse, 2016). In this sense the creativity, innovation, managing limited resources and knowledge of the local area all combine to address situational leadership where differing factors are going to dictate who is best placed to adopt the leadership role.

The closer relationships required in regional offices lends itself toward the authenticity of leadership (Northouse, 2016), which is of importance when considering the Australian culture toward ‘tall poppy’ syndrome (Feather, 1989, 1994). Employees and the wider community are looking toward leaders they can trust, relate to (seen as similar) and who are honest in their dealings (Johnson, 2009; Northouse, 2016). The LDP therefore needs to incorporate this by enabling participants to obtain a greater understanding of oneself and their moral perspective (Madsen & O'Mullan, 2014; Madsen et al., 2014). This component assists to develop the leader toward being an “all-rounder” whereby a greater understanding of oneself is the foundation toward understanding others (Day & Antonakis, 2012) to act independently and in accordance with the strong governance framework of the WAPS.

The important conclusion from this study is that the regional context calls for a more rounded leader, with a mix of core leadership skills, special attributes found in regional leaders and good management based competencies. The special attributes identified in this research are networking or relationship

building, a greater breadth of knowledge and skills, flexibility and resilience, creative thinking, managing limited resources and community engagement or leadership skills. These special characteristics reflect the ways in which regional leadership skills are applied according to the participant interviews.

#### **6.4 Design of a regional leadership development program**

Research question three concerning the design of a regional LDP, was addressed by data from three sources, the interviews with participants and two questions put to respondents in the survey, the first concentrated on the components of a regional LDP whilst the second enabled respondents to comment on what format (duration, sessions) might be implemented. The responses in each of the three sources showed inconsistencies on how a regional LDP might be designed and implemented, however themes were able to be extracted by the researcher and when incorporated with the first two main research questions on the leadership skills required in the regional WAPS has resulted in a prototype LDP being developed.

This section is divided into four main parts with the first addressing the delivery and timing considerations for a regional LDP. The second part reviews content and design considerations for a LDP and the third discusses the choice of participants for a regional LDP. The final part provides a summary of the overall section by providing a recommendation for a prototype regional LDP.

##### **6.4.1 Program delivery**

Leadership development can involve a wide variety of learning formats including workshops, coaching, networking sessions, job shadowing and mentoring (Davis, 2014; Day et al., 2014; Dubrin et al., 2006). Program formats were not a major topic of discussion in the interviews with participants, but the survey asked respondents to rate a range of possible delivery options. The most preferred options were one-day workshops, formal coaching, mentoring from the regional manager, networking sessions and project work. A holistic

program could use all of these options as well as job shadowing and mentoring by other staff, perhaps based around a series of workshops drawn from the skills and topics listed in Table 6.1.

### **Location and format of workshops**

Unsurprisingly, respondents overwhelmingly preferred local workshops to those in other regions, and the metropolitan area was by far the least preferred option. The most popular format was a whole day workshop every month or two over 6-12 months. The second option was a longer, more compact three to five day workshop. Program designers face difficult choices in balancing the length of a program and thus the amount of content that can be addressed against a range of considerations. The considerations identified by the participants that may impact on the uptake of a LDP in the regions were the time that attendees will be away from regular duties, the travel time, accommodation needs, cost of the LDP, the value of networking amongst a broad group or in the local community, and the availability of facilities and staff to deliver the program.

There may be some advantage to having presenters shared among regions, and similarly the value of running a joint program across two or more regions should be considered. A travelling program reduces participants' travel costs but increases presenters' costs. Online sessions via Skype and video conferencing are also viable solutions to some of these concerns.

### **6.4.2 Program Content and design**

The participants were asked about the content and format of a LDP. It appears they had not put much thought into leadership development; they found it difficult to identify relevant topics, referring vaguely to existing metropolitan courses on specific management competencies or organisational skills, rather than leadership and its development as defined in this study. The three leadership topics they did provide - ethics and value conflicts, networking and

the challenges of living and working in a regional community - were covered above.

The views on leadership and its further development can also be inferred from the skills that have been considered important to regional leaders as discussed in section 6.2, 6.3 and summarised in Table 6.1. The survey respondents identified that the top five regional leadership skills are communication, building relationships, integrity in decision making, problem solving and taking action and following through on decisions.

The participants were much clearer about the management competencies needed given the breadth of knowledge required by regional leaders. Participants identified that occupational health and safety, budgeting and funding of deliverables, project management, IT, managing people, managing risk, understanding governance requirements, performance management, change management and staff development were all important components which contribute to the success of a regional leader. These participant findings were further supported by the respondents who sought additional development in mid-ranked survey items such as making sense of reports and accounts, recruiting people, and selecting the right people for projects.

Most of these management based skills are covered in existing WAPS training programs offered by WAPS oversight agencies and can therefore be incorporated into the topic areas of a regional LDP. Failing this most of these management based skills are readily available through the Tertiary and Further Education system (TAFE) through business certificates which provide an alternative option.

In considering the design aspects of a regional LDP, three components were identified in this research, project work, networking and coaching and mentoring, with each being discussed below.



### **Project working groups**

A project could involve working with community members, staff of other agencies or people outside the attendees' normal work circles, (for example not for profit organisations), on something more innovative, challenging, risky and 'real world' than typical work duties. Appropriate senior staff or community members could act as project mentors and provide guidance to the project working group as required. By participating in a working group, networking opportunities are enabled and collaborative relationships developed that provide a source of contacts that should endure well beyond the life of the program (McKenzie, 2001). For example, attendees can meet regularly after the program to continue these networks or in the case of the Leadership WA LDP on the market, the attendees become peer mentors to future program attendees creating an ongoing cycle of networking opportunities.

Project work provides two main benefits, the first being to put leadership skills and concepts encountered in workshops into practice, for example this would be applicable when exploring teamwork principles (Allen et al., 1997; McKenzie, 2001). A second benefit is that the attendees' communication and problem-solving skills, appreciation of diversity, and innovativeness are exercised as the projects often require fresh and realistic thinking (Bradley et al., 2017; Davis, 2014). These are not skills that can be taught through formal learning but stem from the interactions of people sharing ideas (Bradley et al., 2017; Davis, 2014; Day et al., 2014; Dubrin et al., 2006).

### **Networking**

Developing networks has been identified as a vital part of regional leadership in several places above. It is important leaders develop long-term networks that should include agency staff and community members. Other useful contacts may be staff from metropolitan oversight agencies (e.g., the Departments of Commerce, Treasury and Finance), along with other local, state and federal agencies, and in some cases, local private sector organisations. External networks can help leaders find the self-development

and career advancement opportunities participants saw as a significant problem for regional employees (Madsen & O'Mullan, 2014; Madsen et al., 2014). Participating agencies should recognise that the risks of losing staff through encouraging networks are balanced by the cooperative benefits that can be realised, the staff they may gain and their image as a 'good employer'.

### **Coaching and mentoring**

Coaching and mentoring from senior agency staff, staff in other WAPS agencies, or community leaders is an obvious adjunct to workshop learning, and a feasible alternative where resources do not permit workshops. Mentoring and coaching skills can also be taught in workshops, allowing attendees to coach or mentor subordinates or other staff. Peer mentoring and group mentoring are useful alternatives to the traditional one-on-one 'top-down' approach, and may be more effective in circumstances where a suitable highly-experienced individual is not available (Day et al., 2014).

Coaching and mentoring are informal development options useful in making leadership a two-way street where the leader both shapes and is shaped by the development process (Bianco-Mathis, Nabors, & Roman, 2002; Schratz, 2006), refining his or her knowledge and interpersonal skills to become a better leader (Dippenaar & Schaap, 2017). Knowledge emerges as a co-construction of both parties (Day et al., 2014). Coaching and mentoring are consistent with adult learning theory as it provides a source of feedback (Tovey & Lawlor, 2004), which should be part of a module on helping leaders develop their staff.

#### **6.4.3 Choice of participants**

Participants were not asked directly about who should be involved in the program, although some participants suggested that attendees should be volunteers, not required to participate, since leadership is predominately a social process. Leaders must want to lead, have a strong internal locus of control (Parry, 1998), and be willing to develop self-awareness through

personal insight, feedback from others and reflection (Allen et al., 1997; Dippenaar & Schaap, 2017; Drew et al., 2008; Schratz, 2006).

This study did not set out to discover the prerequisite skills, the appropriate experience of the LDP attendees or develop a LDP to target specific employment levels, as different regions may have different requirements or goals, but designers should consider the benefits of a regional LDP to both new and existing staff as discussed above. Consistent with the diverse nature of regional work, it might be appropriate to have flexible criteria and to look for those with leadership potential across a broad range of levels, not just those considered aspirant leaders (level 6+) or those already holding SES positions by the agency.

#### **6.4.4 Summary and recommendations**

Research Question 3 asked what is the best way to deliver a LDP for those staff in regional areas. The interview and survey findings suggest a wide range of leadership skills and interpersonal competencies are needed, and a LDP therefore needs a range of activities from formal leadership skills workshops to mentoring. Training in specific management competencies is also seen as necessary to supplement the leadership focus.

Although this study did not aim to design a single program, the following prototype is suggested for interested agencies to adapt according to their needs:

- A five-day program in the region, based on the cores skills of leadership and emphasising regional specific areas listed in Table 6.1, including:
  - a brief overview of the various leadership theories;
  - the importance of networking;
  - understanding the greater breadth of skills and knowledge;
  - flexibility and resilience during change;

- creative thinking;
  - managing limited resources, and;
  - being a community leader.
- A local project, possibly working with other agencies, community groups or staff of other regions, coordinated by an independent project sponsor;
- Formalised networking sessions, including project members and other stakeholders from a range of local community and employer groups, for example over breakfasts or afternoon tea;
- A formal mentoring program using local leaders in and outside the agency;
- Where possible, one-day workshops or seminars in Perth for every second month over a year, including:
  - Mentoring by metropolitan agency staff;
  - Networking with metropolitan staff and other regional attendees;
  - ‘Showcasing’ of project outcomes, and;
  - Training on management competencies, e.g. ethics and governance, government financial processes, HR processes.

## **6.5 Retention in Regional Offices**

The fourth research question was whether a LDP could help to improve WAPS retention in regional areas. The fourth research question originally focused on retention, but broadening the study focus to include attraction as well, has highlighted the value of leadership development to regional agencies in a few ways not originally envisaged. This section views the factors affecting regional retention and draws on the interviews and survey questions to indicate the relevant findings.

This section confirms the concerns highlighted in Chapter 1 regarding the historical problems with attracting talented employees to the regions and highlights three factors affecting retention in the regions. The section concludes with a short summary on the impact a regional LDP will have on attraction and retention in the regions. Before addressing the outcome of research question four and the link to a regional LDP, it will be helpful to examine the causes of regional attraction and retention problems.

#### **6.5.1 Attraction is also a concern for the regions**

Chapter 1, highlighted that attraction as a strategy for the WAPS has limited application in times of high labour demand due to the inability to be able to compete against the financial offerings of the private sector. In addition, the public sector has often been viewed as a “less desirable” employment option, due to boring jobs (Bentley & Allen, 2006), lower pay rates (Bentley, 2008), high levels of bureaucracy, difficult promotion systems, (Bentley, 2008) and a lack of physical resources (Bentley, 2008).

This resulted in employee retention becoming the primary strategy and focus of this research. Whilst this study did not attempt to identify attraction issues for the WAPS in regional locations, an unexpected finding was that the participants considered the regional staffing problem to be more about attracting talented staff than retaining staff. As a result, this study’s focus was shifted to the enticement of a leadership development program as a means of attracting and retaining staff.

Four of the nine participants did not currently have a problem with turnover, and others felt staff often planned to leave the region for reasons that leadership development would not fix. For example, some staff would be promoted back to Perth after ‘doing their time in the bush’, others would move to other regional centres offering a better lifestyle and some would leave to further their children’s education or partner’s employment. However, all

participants found attracting the right staff a problem, for multiple reasons, which were outside the scope of this research.

The participants and the respondents surveyed gave some similar and some different views on the causes of these problems, in part due to the openness of interview questions and the use of predetermined responses for survey questions. The brief discussion below combines both sets of results into three themes, concerning the lack of promotion or developmental opportunity, job dissatisfaction and lifestyle factors.

### **6.5.2 Lack of promotion or developmental opportunity**

Lack of promotion or development opportunities was the most common theme presented by participants and was further identified in free text options throughout the survey by respondents. Lack of promotion ranked fifth as a reason why survey respondents might leave their position in the next two years, and lack of development opportunities eighth. The related item 'gaining a higher salary in another regional WAPS job' ranked fourth, and finding a job outside the WAPS in equal eighth position. This lack of opportunity is hardly surprising given the smaller workforces in regional offices, exacerbated by recent downsizing and centralisation programs.

In reviewing the literature on causes of voluntary turnover, the lack of developmental or promotional opportunity would be deemed to be an individual work-related variable identified in the "four factor variable model" (Mobley, 1982), which would influence the WAPS employee's intention to stay due to reduced employee satisfaction levels and lower levels of commitment to the regional role. The implementation of a regional specific LDP, would assist to provide a counter balance to the lack of promotional opportunities currently experienced by regional WAPS employees.

The implementation of the regional LDP could be viewed as the WAPS taking a step toward being an 'employer of choice' as it is taking a vested interest in

regional employees by offering access to continuous learning and the potential for future promotional opportunities (Boni, 2005; Earle, 2003). The prototype LDP described above in section 6.4, provides a range of opportunities for an employee to develop leadership capability along with management skills. The design of the program also enables the employee to engage with new networks and practice the skills discussed in the formal aspects of the course.

### **6.5.3 Job dissatisfaction**

Survey respondents ranked three items above promotion and development, two of which are job related: job dissatisfaction and management or leadership style. Other reasons for considering leaving the role were a lack of challenge or variety in the work, lack of flexible work arrangements and problems with teamwork, all ranked sixth to eighth. Like the lack of promotion and development opportunities, these factors are deemed as individual work-related variables (Mobley, 1982), which would again negatively influence intention to stay and reduce overall employee satisfaction.

Since the participants did not report these issues, it appears they were unaware of the severity of these problems, were not exposed to these issues in their workplace or are unwilling to acknowledge them. Regardless of the reason, these issues identified by respondents, perhaps adds to the case for having a regional specific LDP, to reduce these problems in current and future leaders but also because LDPs usually involve senior staff, as sponsors, guest speakers or mentors (Bradley et al., 2017; Brown & Bourke, 2017), for example, bringing them into contact with subordinates.

Three of the free-text responses to the question about why respondents might leave their job indicated 'problems with the manager' or 'bullying', but the significant problems with management style were not otherwise elaborated. However poor support from the manager, lack of empowerment and a lack of respect or valuing of employee's contributions were mentioned in other open questions throughout the survey. When asked to rate their satisfaction with

work and non-work aspects of their life, survey respondents rated support from senior managers relatively low and support from line managers only moderate.

The broad scope of regional jobs, a prominent theme in participant's responses, may be another cause of job dissatisfaction; employees may have felt overstretched or pressured. Difficulty in filling vacant positions may also contribute to work pressure. Pressure may also partly explain the 'problems with teamwork' identified in survey responses. Another factor may be the challenges of providing community services to isolated areas; three participants felt social service providers left their jobs out of frustration with their inability to deal with local health or educational issues, for example.

A regional LDP could help to address job dissatisfaction issues by addressing skill development in both management and leadership capability, enabling WAPS employees to be equipped to deal with the workplace challenges created by a greater breadth of roles. The LDP might also increase the attendee's self-awareness, which could significantly reduce the feeling of being stretched and the frustrations with an inability to deal with complex community issues.

#### **6.5.4 Lifestyle factors**

Life style dissatisfactions were cited as factors affecting retention by over half the participants, who pointed to the lack of education, health, shopping and recreation opportunities, the effects of isolation from family and professional networks, a lack of jobs for family members, and the 'high cost of living' or 'poor housing' in regional locations. In the survey, respondents ranked family responsibilities second, with health and 'study or travel' obtaining rankings in the mid-level, factors that might cause respondents to leave their job and the region.

Mobley (1982), "four factor themes model", would classify these issues as either external environmental variables or individual non-work variables.



Although having a focus outside of the WAPS workplace, these issues are deemed to be significant factors affecting the employee's intention to stay due to the wider psychological considerations and pressures facing the WAPS employee.

While limited services are to be expected in regional areas, the participants thought newcomers often had unrealistic expectations about the effects of regional living on family life. For young people, finding a partner, buying a home and starting a family were complicated by the subsequent difficulties of moving and the distance from family members, while older employees had to deal with finding a family-friendly environment, schooling or university study, and perhaps the care of older family members in distant locations. Medical services for chronic conditions or emergencies often required travel to Perth or major regional centres. Culture shock, climatic challenges, poor quality housing, limited scope for recreation and high costs of living could add to these problems in some regions.

Despite these challenges, the survey showed recreation facilities as the highest source of satisfaction for respondents in a list of work and non-work factors. This could be due to the specific lifestyle factors that regional employees seek (Carson et al., 2010). Overall sixty-nine percent of respondents had been in their job for six or more years. It appears a significant proportion of the workforce have either settled into their new home or are locals by background. An alternative view could also be linked to one of Mobley (1982), variables being the external environmental, in that the employee is unable to get out of the region due to the economic environment or an inability to obtain employment elsewhere.

Although the problems of regional living can often be ameliorated, any sources of life dissatisfaction can interact with the workplace stressors such as lack of job variety and poor management support (Mobley, 1982). The 'spill over' of

work pressures into life and life stressors into work can result in stress that is greater than the sum of the two sources (Dockery & Bawa, 2014).

A LDP such as the prototype described in section 6.4, with such a holistic focus could reduce these lifestyle impacts, as the networking options and project based work provide opportunities for WAPS employees to discuss their concerns and seek feedback about problems from more experienced employees. The social contact in a professional environment will assist in combating the isolation felt by some professionals, strengthening the case for a LDP to be implemented in the regions.

#### **6.5.5 Summary on retention factors**

This section has identified three main factors affecting the retention of regional WAPS employees and highlighted that attraction is perhaps more of a problem than retention. The literature identifies four main variables of turnover, these include: organisational, external environmental, individual work-related and individual non-work related (Mobley, 1982).

In assessing the impacts of a regional LDP on the attraction and retention of regional WAPS employees, participants felt that the issues affecting the workforce in the regions were varied and the implementation of a LDP as a major strategy to address these issues would not be effective. However, participants fully supported the implementation of a regional LDP to address a wide range of other concerns facing the regions, which are detailed further in section 6.6.

### **6.6 Conclusion**

This chapter has compared and integrated the interview and survey findings in relation to the four main research questions concerning: (i) the differences between leadership in regional and metropolitan areas, (ii) the skills required of a regional leader, (iii) the potential content and delivery methods of a

regional LDP, and (iv) the factors affecting retention in regional offices and the value of offering a leadership development program in improving it.

Findings from the interviews and survey suggest staff in regional offices face many challenges not encountered by their metropolitan counterparts. The smaller size of regional offices reduces the opportunities for promotion and career development in general, but also brings a need for WAPS managers and employees in general to be multi-skilled. Not surprisingly, they need a broad range of WAPS management competencies and knowledge, but they also need personal qualities of flexibility, resilience and creativity to deal with the variety of tasks.

Regional staff also need leadership skills, in terms of interpersonal skills and self-awareness. Interpersonal skills are at the heart of modern theories of leadership including behavioural (Northouse, 2016), situational (Blanchard et al., 1985; Northouse, 2016), and transformational theories (Davies, 2007; Day & Antonakis, 2012), and self-awareness is central to authentic leadership theory (Davis, 2014; Duignan, 2015) and ethical leadership (Davis, 2014; Moolenburgh, 2015). Regional leaders also need to be aware of maintaining work-life balance and personal wellbeing, due to the mix of community leadership roles that they may be exposed to.

The findings suggest that regional employees, whether SES, mid-level or low-level operational staff – a distinction less relevant in the ‘flatter’ regional structures – have a particular need to be leaders in all these areas, whereas on the surface, as they are not confronted by as many challenges, metropolitan staff can more easily succeed through management knowledge and the use of core leadership skills alone.

Thus, regional staff need good interpersonal skills to lead other employees in an environment where they are more mutually interdependent, and often influenced by values such as ‘mateship’ in regional Australian cultures

(Ashkanasy & Falkus, 1998). Regional leaders also need to work more closely with the local community than metropolitan counterparts, and may also be viewed as community leaders, requiring both greater interpersonal skills and cultural awareness (Pini, 2003), particularly where the community may present an enigmatic or contradictory view (Ashkanasy & Falkus, 1998), of the WAPS leader due to the decisions that are made in the course of their WAPS duties and maintaining the governance rules of “serving the public interest”.

Self-awareness as a component of leadership (Northouse, 2016), is required to resolve the value conflicts and ethical dilemmas frequently encountered in this broad array of tasks and relationships. It is also important to maintaining boundaries between work and life in a small community and to be able to find a way to accomplish work-life balance (Dockery & Bawa, 2014). These again are greater challenges for regional staff.

Participants thought a regional LDP could help attract talented staff by improving their task and relationship skills and making them an ‘all-rounder’ leader, by addressing skill development in both management and leadership capability. Leadership development, in their view, could give them a clearer career pathway, and help them adjust to the challenges of working and living in regional centres. Many of these challenges cannot be solved by leadership development alone, as the participants emphasised, but sharing them in an environment focused on skills development and self-awareness can significantly reduce regional WAPS employees discomfort and improve the psychological wellbeing of new employees to the regions.

Working in a small office in a regional community, adjusting to the local culture, finding opportunities for family members, combating isolation and the limits of the education, health and recreation facilities and even the weather are good topics for problem-solving and peer mentoring discussions. A program with such a holistic focus could improve employee’s intrinsic job satisfaction, life satisfaction and career prospects while substantially improving leadership in

WAPS offices where traditional management skills alone are not enough. This could become self-perpetuating, spreading leadership skills beyond program participants.

At the same time, it is important to acknowledge the limits on such a LDP, since the job dissatisfaction, poor career prospects and lifestyle problems highlighted by managers and employees also reflect broader concerns. These broader concerns are beyond this thesis to address but do require further investigation.

Despite the above factors affecting retention in the regions, leadership development could not only have the impacts outlined above but also contribute to making regional government agencies “employers of choice” (Boni, 2005; Earle, 2003; Gordon & Lowe, 2002; Nieto, 2008; Rhule, 2004), showing interest in developing staff as future leaders and improving their quality of life. An employer of choice organisation understands the importance of leadership and values diversity, inclusion, meaningful work, work-life balance, opportunities for advancement and continuous learning and development (Earle, 2003; Koltin, 2006; Levin, 2007). Based on this study, it is clear that leadership development could ‘set the ball rolling’ in all these areas and as such it is recommended that WAPS agencies implement this type of program as soon as possible.

## **CHAPTER 7 CONCLUSION**

### **7.1 Introduction**

This chapter summarises the main findings from the research questions posed. It commences with an overview of the research problem, followed by a summary of the methodology used to conduct the research. The findings from the research is summarised before the implications for future research, the contributions to the research and the limitations to this research are discussed.

As a leader in the public sector of Western Australia and having worked in both the metropolitan and regional area, the candidate became aware of the general lack of understanding toward issues facing the regions, particularly in respect to leadership capability and retention. Increasing retention was the major goal behind this study resulting from the researcher's work agency developing an interest in using leadership development to retain regional staff by providing them with a more strategic career pathway.

This interest by the government to address retention issues in the WAPS during the height of the mining and resources boom provided the impetus for this exploratory study. One of the proposals suggested by the government was the introduction of a regional LDP. This strategy was proposed as training mid-level and senior staff in leadership with the intention of improving employee commitment would increase job and career satisfaction (Northouse, 2016; Samad et al., 2015). Consequently, the overarching objective of this research was to identify the skills required of leaders operating in the regions. In addition, it sought to determine if there were any unique needs that would separate their leadership development needs from those of the metropolitan leader, explore the validity of a regional LDP and then ascertain what effect it may have on the retention of WAPS employees in the regions.

These issues were explored using a mixed methodology to the research design, a sample of WA SES and aspirant leaders participated in the qualitative phase, which involved semi structured interviews (n = 9). The information from the interviews assisted in shaping the direction of the quantitative phase of data collection, by providing clarification and a regional context to the online survey questions (n = 156). Each WAPS region (except Peel due to its proximity to Perth) was represented during the qualitative phase, with interviewed participants being selected from the agencies which are strongly represented in the regions. The survey was distributed to regional employees, of all levels including SES and aspirant leaders to gather views about leadership skills required in the regions, what skills needed development, how skills might be developed and their views on both internal and external factors affecting retention.

Findings in the semi-structured interviews revealed that participants primarily considered leadership in terms of managerial staff in the WAPS environment. Many substantial differences between the roles of leaders in metropolitan and regional locations were identified. Regional leaders needed skills to deal with the greater breadth of roles that existed due to the smaller offices and limited resources available in regional locations. The regional leader was also subject to a number of forms of isolation by being in a regional community, these being that professional development opportunities were largely unavailable in the regions, contact with peers and senior leaders within the agency were more restrictive and in varying degrees for some individuals, family and friend networks were limited. The nature of the job, the regional 'country' culture and the isolation led to increased involvement with the wider community which introduced a range of challenges for both leaders and employees, requiring additional management strategies to identify and reduce the exposure to these forms of conflicts of interest.

As a result, regional leaders need to be "all-rounders" due to the diversity of demands that occur in the regions, with increased community involvement,

sometimes as a 'community leader', limited resources and complex social situations being some of the issues that regional leaders need to address. The participants identified that regional leaders had increased levels of autonomy and were responsible for decision making in their location due to the flatter structures found in the regions.

The online survey revealed that the top three skills identified by the respondents as being required of a regional leader were effective communication, integrity in decision making and the capability to build relationships, which are reflected in the wider leadership research (Northouse, 2016), where these skills have consistently been reported over the past century. It was also noted that the list of skills reported in the survey commenced with a leader centric view (e.g. with top rated responses such as communication or integrity), changed toward an awareness of the follower (e.g. developing staff or manage conflict) and then focussed on the situation based factors (e.g. goal setting and selecting the right people for projects). This is like the historical development of leadership research which commenced with the "Great man" theory and progressed toward the identification of the followers and then the situation as the ingredients to effective leadership (Day & Antonakis, 2012). Unsurprisingly, skills that related to management functions were not seen as essential to leadership and were rated outside the top ten skills, but were identified by respondents as requiring additional development.

The integration of the participant interviews and respondent survey has led to the identification of the core leadership skills and special attribute skills required of a regional leader. In addition to these leadership skills it was found that management based skills were also important for the success of a regional leader, the culmination of these two categories, introduced in Table 6.1, has led to the identification of a range of requirements that has led to the development of a regional leader capability profile, which is a major finding for this research.



A related observation is that the top five skills that respondents identified as needing development were not the same listed by those who were self-identified leaders. This is not surprising however, given that respondents were not necessarily leaders or managers in the WAPS and were employees or more senior employees aspiring toward these types of positions. It is a consideration that respondents holding self-identified leadership positions may seek alternative areas of development to employees, becoming a more rounded leader given the breadth of job roles that they are required to perform. The skills that were identified for further development, interestingly, are factors that can improve job satisfaction such as managing conflict and maintain work life balance. This suggests that a LDP may have some influence on retention in the regions by improving the employee's intention to remain with the WAPS.

In respect to the design and delivery of a regional specific LDP, respondents selected options that support adult learning paradigms (Tovey & Lawlor, 2004), in that mentoring, job shadowing, coaching and networking were all listed in the top five. This recognises that adult learners already possess some aspects of the knowledge required and may need additional support in obtaining the theoretical understanding of certain skills through formal learning, but primarily need the opportunity to practice and further refine leadership skills through experiential learning to increase their competency in leadership capability (Bradley et al., 2017).

Participants and respondents identified a range of options for the design, delivery and content of a regional specific LDP, with the most popular option being that the program is delivered in the region over a Perth based program. A key finding of this research is the development of a prototype regional specific LDP as described in section 6.4. The research identified that respondents left the regions predominately at the six to ten year mark indicating if a LDP was to assist with retention in the regions, employees who were in this length of service bracket should be encouraged to nominate for

this development opportunity before they reached that time. Thereby seeking to elongate their length of WAPS in the regions.

To understand the reasons for low retention in the regions the respondents were asked a series of questions that related to work based and non-work based reasons on why they would leave their job in the region. Work based reasons were predominately identified in the top five factors with job dissatisfaction, rated the highest. In third position was the management or leadership style experienced by the employee, with other work based factors such as lack of variety and team work issues also in the top ten. Again, a picture emerges that leadership appears to be lacking in these locations and that additional development could assist in increasing the job satisfaction experienced by employees. The view held by the interviewed participants is that leadership development in the regions is warranted as there are limited opportunities for any form of professional or personal development currently available.

Whilst interviewed participants supported a LDP in the region, they held the view that it would have limited impact on retention in the regions. This was largely due to a range of external factors that affect the intention of a WAPS employee to stay in the region (Mobley, 1982). These factors included family responsibilities, which rated as the second highest factor for leaving by surveyed respondents. The interviewed participants clarified the family factors affecting retention which mainly related to the availability of health care and the education requirements of children particularly as they approached high school. Regional locations were simply unable to offer these services, except in larger populated centres, and even then, the school subjects were restricted to core offerings.

Included in the family responsibility factor was the availability of suitable jobs in the region for family members. This is a particular concern where the partner to the WAPS employee is also a professional and may have to put their career

on hold until such time as a suitable vacancy is identified. Another retention factor identified was the unpreparedness of new employees entering the regions, which led to isolation from a range of networks due to the remote aspects of regional locations. This research indicates that improved outbound training for new employees entering the regions could minimise the impacts of these factors. Finally, people moving to the region had a plan in place to stay for a set duration before looking to transfer and gain promotion either in another region or back to the metropolitan area. This last point is unique to the WAPS as employees do not necessarily leave the “job” or profession, rather they leave the current role and often transfer to a new position which is often a promotional opportunity.

In summary, interviewed participants identified that leadership in the regions was broad with regional leaders having to address several concerns that metropolitan leaders would be unlikely to encounter, such as greater involvement with the community, closer relationships with employees in social settings and higher community expectations to solve problems and achieve outcomes. Challenges faced by regional leaders were the lack of development opportunities, the smaller competitive fields to choose prospective employees from and the lack of career advancement opportunities. The soft skills of communication, managing conflicts, negotiation and developing staff were all identified as skills that needed development and were rated in the top ten of required skills of a regional leader by respondents.

Although not identified by the interviewed participants, work based factors rated highly in the reasons why WAPS employees may consider leaving the job and the region, supporting the need for regional LDPs. However, given the non-work factors, of family responsibilities, the unique work of the WAPS, where people transfer between roles often with the same employer and the consideration that employees move to the region with a set plan to stay for a limited time, indicates that a LDP would have limited impact on retention in the

region, but may have an impact on improving job satisfaction within the wider WAPS.

## **7.2 Implications for future research**

This section identifies the implications for future research stemming from the findings of this study. The discussion addresses potential areas of future research in three areas being leadership, LDPs and retention.

### **7.2.1 Regional leadership skills**

Although the interviewed participants stated that regional leaders required the same leadership skills as a metropolitan leader, they confirmed that a metropolitan leader should not just undertake a regional role without some additional development in leadership specific for the regional role. Unfortunately, they also found it difficult to quantify what they considered “leadership” skills. Interviewed participants blended management skills and leadership skills, which tended to identify that the major differences between a regional leader and a metropolitan leader were largely that a greater breadth and knowledge of management based skills were necessary in regional contexts rather than leadership skills. Future research could be directed toward how leadership skills are applied and implemented differently in the different community orientations of metropolitan and regional settings, providing further insight into the challenges facing regional leaders and the leadership capabilities required to address them.

Further research on the regional leadership capabilities described above and combined with the findings of the regional leadership capability profile (Table 6.1) found in this research may assist in the development of a regional leadership capability framework.

A separate but related area on the identification of the required leadership skills relates to the way they engage and the use of innovation to solve problems

encountered. The interviewed participants identified that as leaders, they engaged with their regional counterparts more frequently, taking a collaborative approach, where the various departments shared information and addressed local social issues jointly. Research that focusses on these collaborative and innovative aspects of leadership, which address good citizenship as seen in ethical leadership (Brown & Bourke, 2017; Davis, 2014), may contribute to a better understanding of leadership in the regions as opposed to management capability and may provide a holistic view of leadership generally within the public sector. This research may also inform the growing number of studies on community engagement, innovation and citizenship in mainstream leadership research.

The third area in which regional leadership practice can be further researched is in relation to the cultural aspects of smaller communities and the expectations on Australian regional leaders. The Australian Anglo-Saxon cultural identity is still prevalent in regional WA; this is often combined with the tall poppy syndrome (Feather, 1989, 1994), and the general isolation of the regions. These cultural aspects can have significant impacts on the regional leader's wellbeing. This was found to be particularly the case at the commencement of a new position, until one was trusted by the community. This combined with the generally quick time it takes to commute home from work (Dockery & Bawa, 2014), the complexities of living and working in a small community and the management of conflicts adds to the permeability of work and home life, and the impacts on leader (and employee) wellbeing. Understanding the strength and the consequences of these impacts on wellbeing will help WAPS agencies to be able to implement effective responses to protect all of their employees.

Interviewed participants identified that the leadership skills of flexibility, resilience and adaptability were typically required to combat the work-life divide. While resilience has been related to leadership in recent research through psychological capital (Luthans et al., 2007), and in authentic

leadership (Duignan, 2015; Johnson, 2009), determining the interplay of self-reliance, self-efficacy and managing value conflicts with the impact on work-life balance is a further area of research and will help establish how authentic and ethical leadership styles can play out in a regional context.

### **7.2.2 Regional LDP**

This research sought to ascertain if the enticement of a LDP would assist in the retention of employees in regional WA. The interviewed participants identified that there were many complex factors affecting retention in the public sector within the regions. It was identified that in the wider sense, a LDP would not significantly affect retention rates due to these complexities, however further research could be directed toward the effectiveness of a LDP toward retention in other sectors outside of the public sector where it may have more application.

Of greater importance, the interviewed participants felt that a LDP could act as a significant strategy for attracting people to the regions and into the WAPS. Further research should be directed toward determining the relationship between an LDP as an attraction strategy to entice people with the desired capabilities to the public sector in the regions. Additionally, this research could also identify if there are factors that affect the attractiveness of each of the nine regions, thus identifying specific issues for each of the regions and providing strategies to address the less desired locations.

Finally, the research on the broad effectiveness of LDPs is still in its infancy (Day et al., 2014) , as such a range of future studies could be conducted in this topic relevant for the regional WAPS. First to mind is the longitudinal study of managers that enter the regions, as suggested by (Day et al., 2014), with the study tracking the individual across their leadership journey, assessing the different trajectories that influence development and the different development rates of individuals. Day et al. (2014) , also identified that actual leadership development takes place in the 'white space' between LDPs i.e. the ongoing

practice of day to day leadership activities. Future research could focus on responding to this notion of 'white space' by focussing on what happens in the everyday activities of leaders that enables them to practice and develop their leadership capability, thus improving future strategies for the individual development of leaders.

### **7.2.3 Regional retention**

This research sought the reasons why respondents might leave their job in the regions, providing an indication of the factors that might affect retention. This is separate to a turnover intention which can lead to avoidable turnover (Lynch & Tuckey, 2004). Only ninety-one respondents answered the question seeking "what contributes to their decision to leave". However, most respondents completed the rest of the survey. This poses several questions for future research, given the unique working relationship in the public sector.

Firstly, further research might be directed toward clarifying if there is a special categorisation of turnover required for the WAPS, where turnover is measured as leaving a role or position rather than the traditional view of leaving an organisation. A WAPS specific turnover terminology may also assist future research, as it is anecdotally known that the movement of WAPS is largely between government agencies as they seek promotional opportunities. This may also be the case for those looking to leave a workplace that they are dissatisfied with, whilst not declaring that this is the reason, due to this improved flexibility to transfer. Changing the number of categories measured to include these types of movements may create a clearer picture of where intervention is needed and identify the specific response that is required.

Secondly, it was made clear that attraction of experienced and suitable candidates is a greater concern for regional leaders than retention. This provides an alternative avenue for future research as results may reveal more SHRM aspects that the WAPS can implement that could improve its attractiveness to talented people searching the labour market. Research in

this area could be directed toward incentives that might entice people with the desired capabilities to the regions. Additionally, this research could also identify if there are factors that affect the attractiveness and retention factors between each of the nine regions, thus identifying specific issues for each of the regions and providing strategies to address the less desired locations.

Finally, further research could be directed toward intentions to leave, in the regional context, given the high rating for job dissatisfaction and management or leadership style as indicated in this research. Future research could focus on whether the job dissatisfaction is stimulated from a local view point or an organisational view, or seeking further clarification on whether the job pressures leading to dissatisfaction are stimulated through regional based factors such as smaller offices, lack of career opportunity and lack of development as has been identified in this research. There is also opportunity to focus future research on negative leadership components affecting job dissatisfaction, further enabling research in identifying the specific leadership skills required in regional locations.

### **7.3 Contributions of the study**

This study contributes to research in the fields of leadership, the design of LDPs for leaders and retention factors in the public sector. Importantly, it adds to the limited focus of these topics in a regional Australian setting. As such this research adds to and further supports some of the previous findings.

#### **7.3.1 Regional leadership skills**

This study confirms that there are differences in the skills required between regional and metropolitan leaders. Critically, while interviewed participants identified that regional leaders need the same leadership skills and capability as metropolitan leaders there was one significant aspect that was clearly different; that a metropolitan leader would need additional development to succeed in a regional location.



Several other interesting findings were revealed. Table 6.1 identified the leadership and management qualities that are prominent for regional WA public sector leaders. Section 4.2 identified the differences between regional and metropolitan leaders from the perspective of public sector SES and aspirant leaders who were currently working in a regional location. This provided the context in which regional leaders operate and how leadership skills need to be applied. Section 5.3 provided a summary of the top ten leadership skills that regional employees identified as being required in leadership positions for the regions.

A broad area of contribution is toward the research on individual differences of leadership with the trait theory having recent attention (Northouse, 2016). Despite the broad list of traits which have been identified over this theory's long history, as cited in Northouse (2016), Stogdill's 1974 survey identified ten characteristics and traits that were positively associated with leadership. The leadership skills identified in this research affirm these "personal characteristics" in leadership (Dubrin et al., 2006; Northouse, 2016). Although this is an exploratory study with a small sample, it contributes to the trait literature by identifying traits relevant to regional leaders in a West Australian context.

Similarly, this research broadly supports, previous research by Roche et al. (2015), where the importance of "soft" skills such as communication, collaboration and emotional intelligence were described. These aspects are reflective of comments made by the interviewed participants who identified that regional leaders required the same leadership skills as metropolitan leaders, with networking, creative thinking and resilience taking a more dominant position. The summary of the top ten leadership skills provided in Section 5.3, contributes to this literature further supporting the importance of effective communication and the capability to build relationships when operating within the regional setting.

This study broadly contributes to authentic leadership which combines transformational and ethical leadership (Davis, 2014). Authentic leadership focusses on three viewpoints, the intrapersonal, developmental and interpersonal (Northouse, 2016). This study adds to the authentic theory in that regional leaders required strong interpersonal skills, self-reliance and self-awareness and were also required to help staff to develop these skills (Table 6.1) given the smaller offices found in regional locations. The inclusion of integrity and ethics as a core regional leadership skill further links to authentic leadership as the community seeks leaders that they can trust and who are honest in their dealings (Johnson, 2009). Whilst this is applicable to all leaders, regional leaders face additional role conflicts when performing their WAPS role along with a community leader role for example the Football Club President and with personal relationships with members of the community and staff due to the smaller communities they live and work in.

Notwithstanding the main aims of this study, the exploratory nature of this research unintentionally provided an insight into Australian leadership cultural views, from a regional perspective. In this research, interviewed participants highlighted that the community has extremely high expectations of their WAPS leaders, not only to deliver services to the community but to be involved in other community leadership roles such as local sporting clubs. Leaders were also expected to hold elevated levels of ethical standing and display flexibility and resilience during change. This resonates with previous research by Pini (2003), who identified that regional Australia has a unique set of cultural influences which stem from the nations convict, frontier settlement and military history. The characteristics of heroism, toughness and self-reliance (Pini, 2003), are also prominent in this research further supporting the unique culture found to be necessary in regional leaders.

Leadership in the region is also hampered by the cultural interaction of the 'tall poppy syndrome' where Australian's have the inclination to criticize and

denigrate high achievers, particularly where their status is excessively built in the eyes of the community or followers (Feather, 1989, 1994). In the regional context, tradition and hierarchal structures still play a dominant role, where social networks and local knowledge play a key role in contributing to the leader's effectiveness (Davies, 2007; Pini, 2003). This research provides additional evidence toward these cultural norms as interviewed participants reported that any slight deviation from community expectation would result in the leaders standing and trust being severely compromised. In this regard, the WAPS leader is somewhat reliant on prominent local leaders to gain and maintain the support of the wider community.

### **7.3.2 Regional LDPs**

This study confirms the concept that a regional LDP is required in the regions to assist regional employees gain leadership skills. Although this research does not provide definitive information as to the design, scheduling and delivery of a regional LDP, it does provide some strong indications from the respondents, as to how a LDP could be shaped to achieve the most successful outcomes for regional leaders. Section 6.4.4 identified a potential prototype for a regional LDP. Section 4.4 identified five key themes that related to LDPs from the perspective of WAPS SES and aspirant leaders who were currently working in a regional location. This result identified that a LDP would be valuable for the regions but also identified potential barriers. While Section 4.6 identified that a LDP would not greatly increase retention, it was critical in showing that LDPs would be an important and effective strategy to attract employees to the regions. Section 5.5 provided a summary of the top ten LDP options.

A broad but important contribution of this research is toward providing a regional LDP prototype section 6.4.4 that could be adopted for interested agencies to adapt according to their needs. The prototype considers current views of adult learning theories by incorporating both intrapersonal and interpersonal skills (Day et al., 2014) featured in the content. The leadership

skills identified for further development also reflect those identified in previous research on LDP content with a greater focus directed toward the transformational skills ranking in the top ten and transactional based skills ranked lower (Madsen et al., 2014). Although this is an exploratory study with a small sample, it contributes to the wider literature on LDPs by identifying the leadership skills that regional leaders have a preference to develop in a West Australian context.

The LDP prototype supports the mixed methodology suggested by Bradley et al. (2017), between formal training (workshops and coursework) to introduce the knowledge aspects of skills i.e. developing leadership for multiple people (Day & Antonakis, 2012; Day et al., 2014), followed by experiential learning to practice and obtain competency (project work and coaching) in leadership skills i.e. a leader development focus for the individual leader (Day & Antonakis, 2012; Day et al., 2014). This format supports the identified research as it provides a richer, more challenging and holistic experience to leadership (Davis, 2014).

### **7.3.3 Regional retention**

This study identified that there are many competing factors affecting the retention of employees in the public sector within WA. Of importance, the study highlighted the unique workings of the public sector and the need to potentially create specific terminology around turnover and retention in the sector, which incorporates an option for a transfer between agencies and a posting within an agency.

A broad but important contribution of this research is toward identifying the variables that may influence a WAPS employee to leave the regions. This research found that both work related, and non-work related factors impacted WAPS employees and influenced their decision to leave the regions. The work-related factors were the lack of promotional opportunities available in the regions due to the flatter structures present in these locations. The other

prominent work-related factor was the limited opportunity for gaining professional development and other forms of development which were generally lacking in the regions. Job satisfaction was also a contributing work-related variable that was ranked highest in the survey. A range of external and lifestyle factors play a significant role on retention in the regions where factors such as health services, education and lifestyle choices were identified. These findings contribute to the wider research on retention factors further supporting the framework provided by (Mobley, 1982).

A further contribution from this research relates to attraction issues for the regions. Over half of the participants advised that attracting a pool of talented candidates to make a selection from is a greater concern than retaining WAPS employees in their region. This supports the issue highlighted in Chapter 1, which was a stimulus of this research on retention.

#### **7.4 Research limitations of this study**

This study has several limitations. First, the samples used in the interviews and survey could both be larger and more representative: limitations on access prevented interviewing other regional agency managers, and the survey attracted only 156 responses from a much larger distribution, for reasons not fully understood but likely related to work pressures and priorities of regional employees. A targeted distribution of the survey to specific regional officers could have achieved a higher response rate.

A second, related, limitation is in the sampling of regional offices. The interviews cover all regions but only one agency in each, and some WAPS agencies are not represented at all. Survey respondents come from a reasonably representative set of regions, but not from all agencies with a regional presence, although opportunity was provided. The most underrepresented sector with a regional presence was the Department of Education, however other agencies not represented well in the survey include

the Department of Justice and the Department of Corrective Services. Further, how these results might generalise to Commonwealth agencies, or state agencies in other states, was not investigated. It is likely that many issues reported here are also experienced in other regional government agencies, and further research on this is recommended.

Thirdly, both forms of data collection involve *self-reported data*, which can introduce many biases (Neuman, 2006; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003) such as the tendency to give socially desirable or self-enhancing answers. For example, it is difficult to validate senior manager's responses without corroboration from peers or subordinates. One issue is that it appears these managers did not recognise the management problems highlighted by survey respondents. Equally, employees answering the survey may have distorted or not fully disclosed their views for a variety of reasons, or may have had skewed perceptions due to local factors not experienced in other locations. Interestingly, employees did not take the opportunity to elaborate on the management problems they rated highly, perhaps out of concern over their anonymity or a sense of team loyalty in a small office.

A fourth limitation in this study is its focus on the enticement of a leadership development program as a strategy to improve retention. Managers and employees both highlighted other factors affecting retention including job design, job satisfaction, career progression, lifestyle factors and employee's intention to take the job for a fixed period. Initiatives to improve these should be considered alongside leadership development, and more research is needed on the broad range of issues affecting retention in regional areas.

A fifth limitation is that the study involves perceptions about leadership development rather than investigation of actual programs. For example, it would be useful to assess leader's skills before and after a development program, or to investigate, how, highly regarded leaders develop their capabilities on and off the job.

Sixth, the online survey question 17 asked respondents to provide an impact rating (0 no impact to 100 high impact) on factors that may influence retention. This question did not provide a not applicable option. This may have resulted in respondents answering the question with a no impact option (0) when the option was in fact not applicable to their circumstances e.g. Family responsibility or Health issue. As the question asked for a rating, the data may have been influenced by this issue.

Additional issues with the structure and available options of the online survey question 18 were also found. Question 18 did not readily distinguish between employees seeking future positions in the metropolitan area versus regional positions in a public sector context only. It would have been interesting to ascertain if the movement of employees within the public sector is firstly greater between the regions or the metropolitan area and secondly if there was a 'region of choice' over other regions. The question also did not consider how respondents may interpret the question i.e. the unique working relationship of the public sector where they may choose not to leave the public sector profession, their agency or the wider public sector. This resulted in only ninety-one respondents answering the question. Adding a not leaving the public sector profession but seeking transfer could have been a useful addition.

Finally, this study was conducted on the down side of the economic cycle after a significant mining boom followed by the global financial crisis. The stimulus for this research was due to the retention issues at that time with people leaving the public sector for the attractive and highly paid mining and other private sector positions in the north of Western Australia. The survey was distributed during a time when economic conditions were 'stable' but with low growth. A different picture might emerge at other points in the economic cycle.

## **7.5 Conclusion**

As an exploratory study of retention and its relationship to regional leadership, this study has shown that investment in a regional leadership development program may have little impact on the retention of employees in regional settings. Participants identified a range of factors affecting retention in regional areas which had greater influence on a regional employee's intention to leave, including the lack of promotional opportunities, the isolation, the broader scope of regional jobs and the limited access to education, health, shopping and recreational opportunities that modern society provides in a metropolis. The respondents rated job dissatisfaction above family commitments as the most prominent reason to leave their current role, indicating that leadership development is required to improve the current levels of leadership capability in the regions. It is clear that improved leadership capability will assist in job satisfaction rates, resulting in increases to an employee's commitment level to the public sector and regional postings.

Participants also identified that developmental opportunities in the regions were extremely limited, thus the implementation of a regionally focussed leadership development program would address some of these wider concerns. In the design of a regional specific leadership program, respondents highlighted that a program delivered in the region which consisted of half day sessions spread across the year which incorporated both intrapersonal and interpersonal development was the preferred option.

Importantly, participants felt that the attraction of talented staff was a greater concern than retention of current staff for regional locations. Given the high fluidity of the public sector where people transfer between locations for promotional opportunity, a specifically designed regional leadership development program may assist as an attraction strategy, which may also have greater flow on effect toward a longer term view on retention. This finding



also suggests that there may be other opportunities for the WAPS to attract talented employees and further research to identify these is warranted.

This exploratory study is the first to provide an insight into the factors affecting retention in a regional public sector setting in WA. Additionally, the findings provide a prototype for a regional specific leadership development program which public sector agencies and other industries may wish to adapt to organisational requirements. The findings suggest many interesting opportunities for future research and together add to the emerging argument for studying factors affecting retention in regional locations for the public sector in its own right. Despite the attraction and retention factors impacting the WAPS, a LDP designed specifically for the regions can assist to attract talented staff the Western Australian regions and to a lesser extent assist in addressing retention issues in the regions.

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## **APPENDIX 1: REGIONAL MANAGER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

Intentionally blank – please contact the researcher.

## APPENDIX 2: ONLINE SURVEY QUESTIONS

### LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT AND RETENTION IN THE WA PUBLIC SECTOR

My name is Damian Lambert and I'm studying for a Master of Business at Edith Cowan University. As part of this I am investigating whether opportunities for leadership development in regional WA public sector agencies can assist the retention of regional staff. The study is supervised by Associate Professor Peter Standen in the School of Business. I currently work for the WA Public Sector Commission.

You are invited to participate in the study by completing a short online survey on how opportunities for developing leadership competences might assist you to remain in the regional workforce, and what benefits might flow to other staff. I would greatly value the sharing of your personal experience and perspective.

Your responses will be anonymous and reported only in terms of aggregate results. The data is fully confidential, being kept securely and destroyed after five years following ECU ethics protocols. The project has been approved by ECU's Human Research Ethics Committee.

A summary of the findings or a copy of the thesis is available on request.

Participation in this project is voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason. If you have any concerns about this study, please contact an independent officer from ECU's Human Research Ethics Office (270 Joondalup Drive, Joondalup WA) on (08) 6304 2170, or via email to [research.ethics@ecu.edu.au](mailto:research.ethics@ecu.edu.au).

Participants can elect to be contacted to provide additional information. Contact will be made via telephone. If you have any questions about participating in the study please do not hesitate to contact my supervisor Associate Professor Peter Standen ([p.standen@ecu.edu.au](mailto:p.standen@ecu.edu.au)), myself ([dslamber@our.ecu.edu.au](mailto:dslamber@our.ecu.edu.au)), or the ECU Human Research Ethics Office.

Your participation in this project is greatly appreciated.

Damian Lambert  
Master of Business Research Student  
[dslamber@our.ecu.edu.au](mailto:dslamber@our.ecu.edu.au)

By clicking the button below you are showing you understand the nature of this study and agree to the conditions above.

## **1. DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION**

These questions will help us to analyze later responses by demographic groups while preserving your anonymity.

Intentionally blank – please contact the researcher for information on the research questions.

Intentionally blank – please contact the researcher for information on the research questions.

## **2. LEADERSHIP SKILLS**

The section below is designed to ascertain what leadership skills are needed to be an effective leader in your region.

Intentionally blank – please contact the researcher for information on the research questions.

Intentionally blank – please contact the researcher for information on the research questions.

### **3. DEVELOPING LEADERSHIP SKILLS**

The next three questions are about different ways the WAPS could develop leadership skills in regional staff.

Intentionally blank – please contact the researcher for information on the research questions.

#### **4. RETENTION IN THE REGION**

The below section is about your intention to leave your region.

Intentionally blank – please contact the researcher for information on the research questions.



Intentionally blank – please contact the researcher for information on the research questions.

Intentionally blank – please contact the researcher for information on the research questions.

## APPENDIX 3 – SURVEY RESULTS LEADERSHIP SKILLS

### “Most Important” Regional Leadership Skills – All respondents

Rank	Skill	Freq.	Percent
1	Communication skills	117	75
2	Integrity in decision making	81	52
3	Building relationships	68	44
4	Taking action and follow through on decisions	67	43
5	Problem solving	61	39
6	Developing staff	47	30
6	Managing conflict and negotiation	46	30
7	Administration and organisation	26	17
7	Maintain wellness / work life balance	26	17
8	Knowledge of local area	25	16
9	Innovation	24	15
9	Recruiting people	24	15
10	Goal setting and time management	22	14
11	Select the right people	17	11
12	Making sense of reports / accounts	8	5

(n = 156)

### “Next Most Important” Regional Leadership Skills – All respondents

Rank	Skill	Freq.	Percent
1	Developing staff	62	40
2	Managing conflict and negotiation	61	39
2	Goal setting & time management	61	39
3	Select right people for a project	55	35
4	Knowledge of local area	51	33
5	Administration and organisation	46	29
6	Innovation	45	29
7	Maintain wellness / work life balance	42	27
7	Integrity in decision making	42	27
7	Problem solving	42	27
8	Taking action and follow through on decisions	41	26
9	Making sense of reports and accounts	35	22
9	Building relationships	34	22
9	Recruiting people	34	22
10	Communication skills	7	4

(n = 156)

**“Least Important” Regional Leadership Skills – All respondents**

Rank	Skill	Freq.	Percent
1	Making sense of reports and accounts	83	53
2	Recruiting people	69	44
3	Maintain wellness / work life balance	58	37
4	Innovation	58	37
5	Select right people for a project	55	35
5	Administration and organisation	55	35
6	Knowledge of local area	50	32
7	Goal setting & time management	44	28
8	Building relationships	23	15
8	Problem solving	23	15
9	Taking action and follow through on decisions	19	12
9	Developing staff	19	12
9	Managing conflict and negotiation	19	12
10	Integrity in decision making	3	2
11	Communication skills	2	1

**(n = 156)**

**Additional “Critical” skills for Regional Leaders – All respondents**

Additional Skill	Freq.
Respecting members (consistent / transparent / equitable / fair)	12
Empowerment of staff (delegating / encourage / supportive)	10
Experience in core technical skills	6
Knowledge of strategy / organisation	4
All of the above skills	4
Ability to juggle multiple issues	3
Part of team (approachable / adaptable)	3
Emotional intelligence	2

**“Most Important” Regional Leadership Skills – Leader**

Rank	Skill	Freq.	Percent
1	Communication skills	48	17
2	Building relationships	33	12
2	Integrity in decision making	33	12
3	Problem solving	27	10
4	Taking action and follow through on decisions	23	8
4	Developing staff	23	8
5	Managing conflict and negotiation	18	6
6	Recruiting people	14	5
7	Goal setting and time management	13	5
8	Innovation	11	4
9	Knowledge of the local area	10	4
10	Maintain wellness, work / life balance	10	4
11	Administration and organisational skills	9	3
12	Select right people for project	6	2
13	Making sense of reports or accounts	1	0

**(n = 61)**

**“Next Most Important” Regional Leadership Skills – Leader**

Rank	Skill	Freq.	Percent
1	Selecting the right people for projects	27	10
2	Developing staff	25	9
2	Knowledge of the local area	25	9
2	Goal setting and time management	25	9
3	Managing conflict and negotiation skills	23	8
3	Innovation	23	8
4	Administration and organisational skills	19	7
5	Taking action and follow through on decisions	18	6
5	Integrity in decision making	18	6
6	Problem solving	17	6
7	Maintain wellness, work / life balance	16	6
8	Recruiting people	15	5
9	Building relationships	14	5
10	Making sense of reports or accounts	12	4
11	Communication skills	4	1

**(n = 61)**

**“Most Important” Regional Leadership Skills – Level 6 and above**

Rank	Skill	Freq.	Percent
1	Communication skills	47	18
2	Building relationships	36	13
3	Integrity in decision making	34	13
4	Problem solving	25	9
5	Taking action and follow through on decisions	23	9
6	Developing staff	15	6
6	Managing conflict and negotiation	15	6
7	Maintain wellness, work / life balance	14	5
8	Innovation	13	5
9	Knowledge of the local area	11	4
9	Recruiting people	11	4
10	Goal setting and time management	10	4
11	Administration and organisational skills	7	3
12	Select right people for project	5	2
13	Making sense of reports or accounts	1	0

**(n = 60)**

**“Next Most Important” Regional Leadership Skills – Level 6 and above**

Rank	Skill	Freq	Percent
1	Developing staff	28	11
2	Managing conflict and negotiation skills	25	10
2	Knowledge of the local area	25	10
3	Goal setting and time management	23	9
4	Selecting the right people for projects	22	8
5	Administration and organisational skills	20	8
6	Taking action and follow through on decisions	16	6
7	Integrity in decision making	15	6
7	Innovation	15	6
7	Recruiting people	15	6
8	Making sense of reports or accounts	14	5
9	Problem solving	13	5
9	Building relationships	13	5
10	Maintain wellness, work / life balance	12	5
11	Communication skills	3	1

**(n = 60)**

### Comparison of “Most Important” Regional Leadership Skills

Skill	Ranking		
	Overall	Leader	Level 6+
Communication skills	1	1	1
Integrity in decision making	2	=2	3
Building relationships	3	=2	2
Take action, follow through on decisions	4	=4	5
Problem solving	5	3	4
Developing staff	=6	=4	=6
Managing conflict and negotiation	=6	5	=6
Administration and organisation	=7	1	11
Maintain wellness / work life balance	=7	10	7
Knowledge of local area	8	9	=9
Innovation	=9	8	8
Recruiting people	=9	6	=9
Goal setting and time management	10	7	10
Select the right people	11	12	12
Making sense of reports / accounts	12	13	13

### Comparison of “Next Most Important” Regional Leadership Skills

Skill	Ranking		
	Overall	Leader	Level 6+
Developing staff	1	=2	1
Managing conflict and negotiation	=2	=3	=2
Goal setting & time management	=2	=2	3
Select right people for a project	3	1	4
Knowledge of local area	4	=2	=2
Administration and organisation	5	4	5
Innovation	6	=3	=7
Maintain wellness / work life balance	=7	7	10
Integrity in decision making	=7	=5	=7
Problem solving	=7	6	=9
Take action, follow through on decisions	8	=5	6
Making sense of reports and accounts	=9	10	8
Building relationships	=9	9	=9
Recruiting people	=9	8	=7
Communication skills	10	11	11

## APPENDIX 4 – SURVEY RESULTS LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT NEEDS

### Respondents' Leadership Development Needs – All respondents

Rank	Skill	$\mu$	Md.	Mo	$\sigma$	$\sigma$ from $\mu$
1	Managing conflict and negotiation	56	60.5	50	26.42	2.10
2	Maintaining wellness, work / life balance	55	60.0	50	30.9	1.79
3	Innovation	52	52.5	50	24.3	2.12
4	Developing staff	50	52.5	50	28.99	1.72
5	Communication skills	45	50.0	20	26.23	1.73
6	Goal setting & time management	43	49.5	50	26.79	1.60
6	Making sense of reports and accounts	43	44.0	20	27.4	1.56
7	Building relationships	42	48.5	50	25.49	1.66
7	Taking action and follow through on decisions	42	50.0	50	25.36	1.66
7	Recruiting people	42	40.0	0	31.01	1.35
8	Problem solving	41	43.0	60	25.39	1.63
8	Select right people for a project	41	46.5	0	27.35	1.50
9	Knowledge of the local area	39	35.5	20	28.41	1.37
10	Administration and organisation	38	38.5	0	25.11	1.50
11	Integrity in decision making	33	29.0	0	25.67	1.30

### Additional issues identified by respondents – All respondents

Additional Skill	Frequency
Access to education / development opportunity	6
Career progression movement required to progress	5
Manage deficient performance	2
Fiscal management – budget funding sources	2
Business intelligence systems / change management	2



## APPENDIX 5 – SURVEY RESULTS LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

### “Most Important” Program Options – All respondents

Rank	Option	Freq.	Percent
1	Full day workshop session in region	45	29
2	Formal coaching	42	27
3	Mentoring – regional manager (in the region)	40	26
4	Networking sessions	38	24
5	Project work to practice skills	37	24
6	Mentoring – specialist manager (region based)	36	23
7	5 day course in region	35	22
8	Skills gap analysis test	31	20
8	3hr workshop session in region	31	20
9	Online / video conference	27	17
10	Job shadowing – current manager	25	16
10	Job shadowing – other regional manager	25	16
11	Mentoring – regional manager (out of the region)	19	12
12	University study	16	10
13	5 day course in Perth	14	9
14	Full day workshop session in Perth	13	8
15	Mentoring – specialist manager (Perth based)	12	8
16	Job shadowing – Perth manager	9	6
17	3hr workshop session in Perth	3	2

**(n = 156)**

**“Next Most Important” Program Options – All respondents**

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Option</b>	<b>Freq.</b>	<b>Percent</b>
1	Mentoring – specialist manager (region based)	37	24
2	Mentoring – regional manager (out of the region)	36	23
3	Job shadowing – other regional manager	32	21
3	Mentoring – specialist manager (Perth based)	32	21
4	Formal coaching	31	20
5	Networking sessions	30	19
5	Mentoring – regional manager (in the region)	30	19
6	Full day workshop session in region	28	18
7	Skills gap analysis test	27	17
7	Online / video conference	27	17
8	Job shadowing – current manager	26	17
9	Project work to practice skills	24	15
9	5 day course in region	24	15
9	5 day course in Perth	24	15
10	Full day workshop session in Perth	22	14
11	University study	20	13
12	3hr workshop session in region	19	12
13	Job shadowing – Perth manager	18	12
14	3hr workshop session in Perth	14	9

**(n = 156)**

**“Least Important” Program Options – All respondents**

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Option</b>	<b>Freq.</b>	<b>Percent</b>
1	3hr workshop session in Perth	49	31
2	Job shadowing – Perth manager	48	31
3	University study	39	25
4	Full day workshop session in Perth	38	24
5	5 day course in Perth	37	24
6	Mentoring – specialist manager (Perth based)	31	20
7	3hr workshop session in region	27	17
7	Online / video conference	27	17
8	Job shadowing – current manager	26	17
9	5 day course in region	24	15
10	Skills gap analysis test	22	14
11	Job shadowing – other regional manager	21	13
11	Mentoring – regional manager (out of the region)	21	13
12	Project work to practice skills	16	10
13	Mentoring – regional manager (in the region)	15	10
14	Networking sessions	12	8
15	Mentoring – specialist manager (region based)	11	7
16	Full day workshop session in region	10	6
17	Formal coaching	7	4

**(n = 156)**

**“Most Important” Program Options – Leader**

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Option</b>	<b>Freq.</b>	<b>Percent</b>
1	Formal coaching	27	44
2	Full day workshop session in region	23	38
3	Mentoring – specialist manager (region based)	20	33
4	Networking sessions	18	30
4	Skills gap analysis test	18	30
5	3hr workshop session in region	17	28
5	Mentoring – regional manager (in the region)	17	28
6	Job shadowing – other regional manager	16	26
7	Project work to practice skills	15	25
8	Online / video conference	14	23
8	5 day course in region	14	23
9	Mentoring – regional manager (out of the region)	11	18
10	Full day workshop session in Perth	9	15
11	University study	8	13
12	Job shadowing – current manager	7	11
12	5 day course in Perth	7	11
12	Mentoring – specialist manager (Perth based)	7	11
13	Job shadowing – Perth manager	3	5
14	3hr workshop session in Perth	2	3

**(n = 61)**

**“Next Most Important” Program Options – Leader**

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Option</b>	<b>Freq.</b>	<b>Percent</b>
1	Mentoring – specialist manager (Perth based)	21	34
2	Mentoring – regional manager (out of the region)	20	33
3	Networking sessions	19	31
4	Mentoring – regional manager (in the region)	17	28
5	Online / video conference	16	26
5	Full day workshop session in region	16	26
5	5 day course in region	16	26
6	Job shadowing – other regional manager	15	25
6	Project work to practice skills	15	25
6	Skills gap analysis test	15	25
7	Mentoring – specialist manager (region based)	14	23
8	Formal coaching	13	21
8	5 day course in Perth	13	21
9	Job shadowing – current manager	12	20
9	Job shadowing – Perth manager	12	20
9	University study	12	20
10	Full day workshop session in Perth	9	15
11	3hr workshop session in region	7	11
12	3hr workshop session in Perth	6	10

**(n = 61)**

**“Most Important” Program Options – Level 6 and above**

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Option</b>	<b>Freq.</b>	<b>Percent</b>
1	Formal coaching	28	47
2	Full day workshop session in region	22	37
3	Networking sessions	20	33
4	Skills gap analysis test	19	32
4	3hr workshop session in region	19	32
5	Mentoring – specialist manager (region based)	17	28
6	Online / video conference	16	27
6	Mentoring – regional manager (in the region)	16	27
7	5 day course in region	15	25
8	Project work to practice skills	14	23
9	Job shadowing – other regional manager	12	20
9	Mentoring – regional manager (out of the region)	12	20
10	Full day workshop session in Perth	7	12
10	Mentoring – specialist manager (Perth based)	7	12
11	University study	6	10
11	5 day course in Perth	6	10
12	Job shadowing – current manager	5	8
13	Job shadowing – Perth manager	4	7
14	3hr workshop session in Perth	2	3

**(n = 60)**

**“Next Most Important” Program Options – Level 6 and above**

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Option</b>	<b>Freq.</b>	<b>Percent</b>
1	Mentoring – regional manager (out of the region)	19	32
2	Networking sessions	18	30
2	Mentoring – specialist manager (region based)	18	30
3	5 day course in region	17	28
4	Full day workshop session in region	16	27
4	Mentoring – specialist manager (Perth based)	16	23
5	Job shadowing – other regional manager	14	23
5	Project work to practice skills	14	23
5	Skills gap analysis test	14	23
5	Mentoring – regional manager (in the region)	14	23
6	Online / video conference	13	22
7	Job shadowing – current manager	12	20
7	Formal coaching	12	20
7	University study	12	20
7	Full day workshop session in Perth	12	20
7	5 day course in Perth	12	20
8	3hr workshop session in region	8	13
9	Job shadowing – Perth manager	7	12
9	3hr workshop session in Perth	7	12

**(n = 60)**

### Comparison on Rankings Top 5 - Development Program

Option	Overall	Leader	Level 6+
Formal coaching	2	1	1
Full day workshop session in region	1	2	2
Networking sessions	4	=4	3
Skills gap analysis test	=8	=4	=4
3hr workshop session in region	=8	=5	=4
Mentoring – specialist manager (region based)	6	3	5
Online / video conference	9	=8	=6
Mentoring – regional manager (in the region)	3	=5	=6
5 day course in region	7	=8	7
Project work to practice skills	5	7	8
Job shadowing – other regional manager	=10	6	=9
Mentoring – regional manager (out of region)	11	9	=9
Full day workshop session in Perth	14	10	=10
Mentoring – specialist manager (Perth based)	15	=12	=10
University study	12	11	=11
5 day course in Perth	13	=12	=11
Job shadowing – current manager	=10	=12	12
Job shadowing – Perth manager	16	13	13
3hr workshop session in Perth	17	14	14



### Comparison on Rankings Mid 5 - Development Program

Option	Overall	Leader	Level 6+
Mentoring – regional manager (out of region)	2	2	1
Networking sessions	=5	3	=2
Mentoring – specialist manager (region based)	1	7	=2
5 day course in region	=9	=5	3
Full day workshop session in region	6	=5	=4
Mentoring – specialist manager (Perth based)	=3	1	=4
Job shadowing – other regional manager	=3	=6	=5
Project work to practice skills	=9	=6	=5
Skills gap analysis test	=7	=6	=5
Mentoring – regional manager (in the region)	=5	4	=5
Online / video conference	=7	=5	6
Job shadowing – current manager	8	=9	=7
Formal coaching	4	=8	=7
University study	11	=9	=7
Full day workshop session in Perth	10	10	=7
5 day course in Perth	=9	=8	=7
3hr workshop session in region	12	11	8
Job shadowing – Perth manager	13	=9	=9
3hr workshop session in Perth	14	12	=9

### Implementation options of Regional Leadership Development Program

Format	Frequency of Format	Held in Region Y/N	Duration	
			2-3 months	Every month
Week long (3-5 days)	9	Y	Y	
Full day (annually)	8	Y		Y
Info session with networking	4			
Online	4			
3 day long course	4			
Full day	3	Y	Y	
Video conference	3	Y		Y
4 sessions annually	2	Y		
1/2 day (6 months)	2	Y		Y

## APPENDIX 6 – SURVEY RESULTS REGIONAL RETENTION

### Factors encouraging respondents to leave

Rank	Factor to leave	$\mu$	Md.	Mo	$\sigma$	$\sigma$ from $\mu$
1	Job dissatisfaction	59	70	100	37	1.60
2	Family responsibility	56	65	100	34	1.65
3	Management / leadership style	54	60	100	36	1.51
4	Higher salary PS – other region	50	60	0	38	1.31
5	Lack of promotion	49	50	0	38	1.30
6	Lack challenge / variety	48	50	.00 <sup>a</sup>	35	1.35
7	Team work issues	47	50	0	34	1.40
7	Lack of flexible work options	47	50	0	35	1.33
8	Lack of professional development	45	50	0	36	1.25
8	Better employment ext. PS	45	35	0	40	1.12
9	Health issue	44	50	0	37	1.19
10	Location / physical environment	42	50	0	35	1.18
11	Study / travel	38	25	0	38	1.02
11	End of contract	38	12	0	43	0.87
11	Insufficient remuneration	38	27	0	37	1.01
12	Forced relocation	37	16	0	40	0.92
12	Higher salary PS – metro	37	20	0	39	0.95
13	Work travel changed	29	20	0	30	0.97
14	Retirement	24	0	0	36	0.65

(n = 91, .00<sup>a</sup> = multiple modes were obtained)

### Factors encouraging respondents to leave – Free text responses

Other reasons	Freq.
Family	4
Prof support / development	4
End of contract / no budget	4
Manager / bullying	3
Lack of promotion	2
Job related	2
Study	1
Government strategy	1
Access to services	1

### Types of alternative employment sought

Rank	New employment option	Freq.	Percent
1	Public Sector - WA State Government	59	38
2	Public Sector - Commonwealth Government	31	20
3	Private Sector - Other Industry type - in current region	28	18
4	Self Employment	25	16
5	Public Sector - Other State Government	24	15
6	Public Sector - Local Government	21	13
7	Not looking for further employment (maternity etc.)	14	9
8	Private Sector - Perth Based	10	6
9	Private Sector - Mine, Man. Build. Con. - current region	9	6
9	Private Sector - Other Industry type - in another region	9	6
10	Australian Defence Forces	7	4
11	Private Sector - Mine, Man. Build. Con. - other region	5	3
12	Other (please specify)	4	3

(n = 156)

### Types of alternative employment sought – Free text responses

Other options	Freq.
International - private or public	1
Nursing agency for interstate work	1
Anywhere, provided job is interesting, offers reasonable flight costs	1

### Sources of satisfaction / dissatisfaction in the region

Rank	Source	$\mu$	Md.	Mo	$\sigma$	$\sigma$ from $\mu$
1	(If relevant) Opportunity to relocate – new region	54	50	50	30	1.78
2	(If relevant) Relocation to new region	47	50	50	31	1.52
3	Housing / Accommodation options	52	51	.00 <sup>a</sup>	33	1.59
4	Community services are adequate	59	60	100	29	2.02
5	Adequate support from senior management	50	50	50	29	1.74
6	Adequate support from direct line management	56	53	100	32	1.75
7	Access to technology / infrastructure is sufficient	59	62	51	27	2.14
7	Access to educational facilities is sufficient	49	51	.00 <sup>a</sup>	31	1.58
8	Recreation facilities sufficient	60	61	100	31	1.90
8	Other	37	50	0	32	1.13

(n = 91, .00<sup>a</sup> = multiple modes were obtained)

### Sources of satisfaction / dissatisfaction in the region – Free text responses

Other sources	Freq.
Community Activity options / Social interaction	2
No support or direction from leadership	1
Location allowances variation of packages between state agencies varies	1
No regional airport	1